

# PRABUDDHA BHARATA

*or* AWAKENED INDIA

A monthly journal of the Ramakrishna Order  
started by Swami Vivekananda in 1896



**November 2018**

**Vol. 123, No. 11**

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# THE ROAD TO WISDOM

## SWAMI VIVEKANANDA ON *Benefits of Breath Control*

We see with our common sense that it is the breath [that] is setting everything in motion. If I stop breathing, I stop. If the breath begins, [the body] begins to move. What we want to get at is not the breath itself. By the help of things on the material plane, we have come to finer and finer [perceptions]. The universe is one, whatever point you touch. All the points are but variations of that one point. Throughout the universe is a unity (at bottom). Even through such a gross thing as breath I can get hold of the Spirit itself. By the exercise of breathing we begin to feel all the movements of the body that we [now] do not feel. As soon as we begin to feel them, we begin to master them. Thoughts in the germ will open to us, and we will be able to get hold of them. Of course, not all of us have the opportunity nor the will nor the patience nor the faith to pursue such a thing; but there is the common sense idea that is of some benefit to everyone. The first benefit is health. Ninety-nine percent of us do not at all breathe properly. We do not inflate the lungs enough. Regularity [of breath] will purify the body. It quiets the mind. When you are peaceful, your breath is going on peacefully, [it is] rhythmic. If the breath is rhythmic, you must be peaceful. When the mind is disturbed, the breath is broken. If you can bring the breath into rhythm forcibly by practice, why can you not become peaceful? When



you are disturbed, go into the room and close the door. Do not try to control the mind, but go on with such rhythmic breathing for ten minutes. The heart will become peaceful. These are common sense benefits that come to everyone. Deep-breathing exercises [are only the first step]. There are about eighty-four [postures for] various exercises. Some [people] have taken up this breathing as the whole [pursuit] of life. They do not do anything without consulting the breath. They are all the time [observing] in which nostril there is more breath. When it is the right, [they] will do certain things, and when [it is] the left, they do other things. When [the breath is] flowing equally through both nostrils, they will worship. When the breath is coming rhythmically through both nostrils, that is the time to control your mind. By means of the breath you can make the currents of the body move through any part of the body, just [at] will. Whenever [any] part of the body is ill, send the Prana to that part, all by the breath.

From *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, (Kolkata: Advaita Ashrama, 2016), 1.490-92.



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**EDITORIAL OFFICE**  
Prabuddha Bharata  
Advaita Ashrama  
PO Mayavati, Via Lohaghat  
Dt Champawat · 262 524  
Uttarakhand, India  
Tel: 91 · 96909 98179  
prabuddhabharata@gmail.com  
pb@advaitaashrama.org

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West Bengal, India  
Tel: 91 · 33 · 2289 0898  
2284 0210 / 2286 6450 / 6483  
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# Appeal for Rural Empowerment

Dear Devotees & Well-wishers,

Ramakrishna Math, Rajarhat Bishnupur, started in 1953 at the birthplace of Swami Niranjanananda, a direct disciple of Sri Ramakrishna is one of the branch centres of Ramakrishna Math & Mission, headquartered in Belur, West Bengal. The present temple was inaugurated in 1986 by Most Revered Swami Bhuteshanandaji Maharaj.



Besides daily worship and special celebrations, we also serve the needy families, children, and day-labourers of this district under the rural development project. Though merely 15

km from Salt Lake, Kolkata, it is yet to see development. Presently our medical services (allopathic & homeopathy) cater to about 1000 patients per

month. Our educational services includes free coaching to about 150 poor students (classes I to X) and vocational skills training in plumbing and electrical for boys and tailoring for women.



To cater to the increasing demand for medicare among the poor and to give thrust to education of the children in this area we wish to start the following service activities with munificent support from devotees, well-wishers and corporates:

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❖ Monthly ration for widow mothers	3,00,000
❖ Community Hall and a Guest House for Devotees	10,00,000

We appeal to you to generously extend your financial / material support for the above. You may choose any one or two heads and mark your contribution. Donations however humble would be thankfully acknowledged.

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May the blessing of the Holy Trio and Swami Niranjananandaji be upon you all.

With loving namaskars and best wishes,

Yours sincerely,  
Swami Harimayananda  
Adhyaksha



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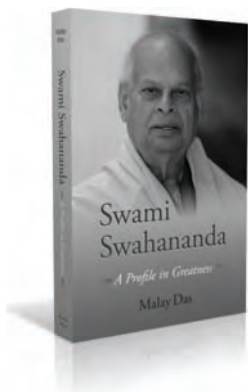
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## SWAMI SWAHANANDA *A Profile in Greatness*

by Dr. Malay Das

The spiritual head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California for thirty-six years, Swami Swahananda, a direct disciple of Swami Vijnanananda, worked ceaselessly to spread Sri Ramakrishna's message. He established seventeen centers and sub-centers throughout the United States and has left the Ramakrishna movement in the West a rich legacy.

In this intimate, loving portrait, Dr. Malay Das presents Swami Swahananda as he knew him during the last seventeen years of the swami's life. We witness the guru's compassionate care for devotees and disciples, his ability to love with detachment, and his dignity and grace during his final illness.

Written in a simple, lucid and entertaining style, this spiritual biography will inspire sincere spiritual seekers from all traditions and offer them a glimpse into the wonderful life and work of this great monk and spiritual leader.



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# TRADITIONAL WISDOM

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**Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached!**

## Maitrayaniya Upanishad

November 2018

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### मैत्रायणीयोपनिषत्

अथान्यत्राप्युक्तं अतः परास्य धारणा तालु-रसना-ग्रनिपीडनाद्वाङ्मनःप्राणनिरोधनाद् ब्रह्म तर्केण पश्यति  
यदात्मनात्मानमणोरणीयांसं द्योतमानं मनःक्षयात् पश्यति तदात्मनात्मानं दृष्ट्वा निरात्मा भवति निरात्मकत्वाद-  
सङ्ख्योऽयोनिश्चिन्त्यो मोक्षलक्षणमित्येतत्परं रहस्यमित्येवं ह्याह ।

चित्तस्य हि प्रसादेन हन्ति कर्म शुभाशुभं ।

प्रसन्नात्मात्मनि स्थित्वा सुखमव्ययमश्नुता इति ॥

॥ ६.२० ॥

*Athany-atrapy-uktam atah parasya dharana talu-rasana-granipidanad vang-manah-prana-  
nirodhanad brahma tarkena pashyati yad-atmana-atmanam-anor-aniyamsam dyotamanam  
manah-kshayat pashyati tad-atmana-atmanam drishtva niratma bhavati niratmakatvad-  
asamkhyo'yonish-chintyo moksha-lakshanam ity-etat param rahasyam-ity-evam hy-aha.*

*Chittasya hi prasadena hanti karma shubha-ashubham.*

*Prasannatma-atmani sthitva sukham-avyayam-ashnuta iti.*

(6.20)

And thus it has been said elsewhere: 'There is yet a higher concentration than this for that person. By pressing the tip of the tongue down the palate, by restraining voice, mind, and breath, one sees Brahman through contemplative thought. When, by the suppression of the mind, one sees through self, one sees the shining self, more subtle than the subtle, then having the self through the self, one becomes selfless. Because of one's being selfless, one is to be thought of as immeasurable, without origin. This is the mark of liberation, the highest mystery.' For thus has been said: 'For by the serenity of thought, one destroys deeds, good and evil, with the serene self abiding in the self, one enjoys eternal happiness.' (6.20)

# THIS MONTH

**W**HAT IS Swami Vivekananda's singular contribution to the idea of a universal religion? Did he prefer any one religion to the rest or did he come up with an idea of an eclectic religion? Swamiji's unique insight into religious pluralism is discussed in **Cloud Religion**.

Swami Vanishananda, Ramakrishna Math, Kayamkulam, does **A Re-reading of Swami Vivekananda's Paper on Hinduism** by analysing the philosophical and religious ideas presented therein in the light of scriptures.

Eric S Fallick, a Platonist contemplative ascetic, renunciant, eremitical monastic, mystic, and philosopher from Silver Spring MD, USA, explains the challenges of and the ways to live a life of **Unsupported Eremitical Contemplative Asceticism**.

Nothing was known till the spring of 1950 about Swami Vivekananda's stays at Salem in the US. In 1950, a curious advertisement for sale of a trunk and a walking stick reportedly belonging to Swamiji came up in a magazine dealing with antiques. Someone brought this to the notice of the Vedanta Society of Northern California. Those articles were instantly sent for, and correspondence began to unearth the history in background. Such exchanges were made with one Mrs Helen Tyson Woods, who initially had put the said advertisement. This was how with invaluable fragments of anecdotes and indelible memories of a long past that the world could learn that during late August of 1893 Swamiji had been to the Woods's house at Salem, as well as about his sudden unannounced revisit when he gave his valuable possessions to the

Woods family. Somenath Mukherjee, a researcher at Ramakrishna Mission Institute of Culture, Kolkata, traces this history in **Kate Tannatt Woods: The Chosen Woman of Her Century**.

Ambili S, assistant professor in the department of philosophy at the Government College for Women, Thiruvananthapuram, analyses the writings of Swami Satprakashananda to trace **Vedantic Socialism: Cosmopolitan Reflections of Swami Vivekananda**.

Many wonderful nuggets of wisdom contained in ancient scriptures are difficult to understand. In *Balabodha*, such ancient wisdom is made easy. This month's topic is **Shanti**. Understanding this popular word is necessary to understand its meaning.

Repeating the holy name of God leads to the purification of one's mind and ennoble one to higher aspirations in life. It eventually leads to mukti, complete freedom from repeated births and deaths. The greatness of the name of God is explained in the story **The Holy Name of God**. This story is this month's *Traditional Tales* and has been translated from the Tamil book *Anmika Kathaigal*.

Monika Renz, a practising psychotherapist; music therapist; theologian; spiritual caregiver; head of the psycho-oncology unit at St Gallen Cantonal Hospital, Switzerland; an international lecturer; author of several books; and a researcher in the fields of dying, spirituality, and spiritual care; has written the book **Dying: A Transition**. From this book, we bring you this month's *Manana*.



# Cloud Religion

THE WORD 'CLOUD' GENERALLY brings an image of fogginess into our minds. It is either a fogged sky or a fogged mind. Cloud denotes confusion and a general lack of clarity. It also denotes darkness and ignorance. It symbolises uncertainty. Many gloomy moments of despair and sadness are also called cloudy moments. Despair has long been compared with clouds. Spiritual masters have equated clouds with struggle for clarity in spiritual path. In sum, the word 'cloud' does not quite generate positive feelings within us. But that is the general meaning of the word.

What could be the other meanings or connotations of the word 'cloud'? When struggling and sweating in parched lands with parched throats, a sign of clouds on the sky is a welcome relief indeed. Clouds are aggregators, collectors of raindrops. If they do not burst, clouds can bring the essential shower quenching the thirst of the earth with that of the numerous flora and fauna on it. However, in the technological era, particularly in recent times, the word 'cloud' has acquired a different meaning. It is used as a metaphor for the Internet and refers to accessing computers, information technology, software applications, and the like through a network, often accessing data centres that are remotely located. So, anyone can access one's data and software from practically anywhere in the world, where Internet connectivity is available. This means that anyone can have one's information, that means all work in the present age, independent of a particular physical location. This kind of computing or working with information technology is called 'cloud computing'.

Cloud computing has enabled 'cloud sharing'. Now, anyone having an expertise in a particular field can share one's wisdom through data to

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**All religions should forego one's claim to be the only true and proper religion.**

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anyone across the globe. Better still, the person sharing such data need not individually know the persons being benefited by the data. Various cloud repositories enable one to just upload one's data or software to the cloud and make it available for anyone willing to download and use it.

We have countless people using data available in the public domain and also improving upon existing data and software with corrections and tweaks, making the data and software better than it was when they received it. There are many examples of this but the popular ones are the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia and the famous software repository GitHub. This phenomenon of cloud sharing has been developed further and now we have machine services or artificial intelligence services available, albeit for a charge, online, in the cloud. This again obviates the need for having expensive computers working out difficult algorithms when all you have to do is to submit your problem to the cloud machine services repository, the famous being Amazon Web Services.

All this is wonderful indeed. However, cloud sharing and the concept of cloud in general might not be as recent as we might believe. Though the label 'cloud' was not used by him, Swami Vivekananda pioneered the idea of sharing ideas free

from location and time, as early as 1893 when he addressed the World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago. Lest the reader be surprised, the idea referred to here is that of religion. How the idea of religion can become parallel to a concept of information technology or the Internet would soon become clear.

The idea of religion or any idea is quite similar to data, particularly the kind governed by electrical pulses as in information technology. Ideas are abstract, even the concrete ones are. And the bits and bytes of the computer world are quite elusive indeed. All ideas are in a way 'uploaded' to the cosmos. Swamiji believed in the power of ideas and insisted that noble thoughts accompanied with strong mental power could transform the world. Therefore, we can rest assured that ideas are 'uploaded' the moment someone can think of them. Of course, the 'downloading' of ideas happens in various ways. If the person at the receiving end possesses a powerful mind, then she or he can intuit the idea from the cosmos. If the person receiving the idea is a lesser mortal, then she or he can receive the idea through words, verbal or written.

Now comes the more challenging task of 'cloud sharing' of religious ideas. It seems that the free flow of religious ideas amongst human beings would not be difficult thanks to technology, particularly to the Internet. Towards the end of his 'Paper on Hinduism' delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions, Swamiji said that the only possibility of a universal religion was a religion that would have 'no location in place or time'; in other words, it should be independent of place or time, much like cloud computing. The core idea that is the reason behind the increasing success of cloud sharing in computing is the willingness to be open to share, without insisting exclusive copyrights, and also the willingness to be open to scrutiny from other users and programmers.

If Swamiji's idea of a 'cloud religion'—though

he never called it so, he definitely had the same idea—were to become a reality, *all* practitioners of *all* religions and religious traditions should forego one's claim to be the only proper religion and instead just share or 'upload' their ideas to the world at large. This would mean that all religious texts, scriptures, rituals, dogmas, doctrines, traditions, artistic portrayals, sculptures, temples, churches, mosques, and all other imaginable symbols and motifs of religion be made accessible and available to one and all. Every religious thought ever conceived by humanity should be spelt out in vivid details and made understandable in every tongue that human beings have known to speak. All this should be open to scrutiny and modification by anyone who wants. While the traces of the original would be continued to be preserved, all this could be adapted to suit the tastes and temperaments of any individual. All this would be done without anyone's exclusive claim to religious truths and without any fear, even of the slightest criticism.

That would be true cloud religion. There is only a small caveat though. Just like cloud computing or cloud sharing in computing should be used to further the aims of technology in general, Swamiji wants that this universal religion, which we prefer to call 'cloud religion' should 'recognise divinity in every man and woman', and naturally in every transgender, 'and whose whole scope, whose whole force, will be created in aiding humanity to realise its own true, divine nature'. This caveat is necessary in order to prevent fundamentalist theories of religion being put into this cloud of religion or destructive forces trying to preach their doctrines as a religion, as is the wont of many cults. This is similar to cloud sharing in information technology, where vicious programmes like viruses or trojans should not be given place in the cloud.

The question is: How many are ready to contribute to and be a part of cloud religion? Are you?



# ***A Re-reading of Swami Vivekananda's Paper on Hinduism***

**Swami Vanishananda**

**T**HROUGH A SERIES of lectures delivered at the World's Parliament of Religions at Chicago in the month of September 1893, Swami Vivekananda had proclaimed before the world in clear, lucid, and unambiguous terms the greatness and glory of the spiritual heritage of India. In so doing he had presented that very heritage as an effective model for synthesising all divergent sectarian religious beliefs, prevalent not only in India but all over the world. The current year being the 125th anniversary of those momentous addresses, this would be a better time than ever to contemplate, understand, and assimilate the spiritual message contained in them.

The focus of the present article will be the third recorded address of Swamiji before the Parliament, delivered on 19 September 1893 titled 'Paper on Hinduism'. The best way to remind us of the significance of this talk is to quote the great Sister Nivedita: 'It may be said that when he began to speak it was of "the religious ideas of the Hindus", but when he ended, Hinduism had been created.'<sup>1</sup> The doubt that arises is, Hinduism being a synonym for Sanatana Dharma, eternal religion, how can it be 'created'? The answer is, he subjected the mind-boggling diversity of the philosophical and religious ideas of the Hindus to a searching analysis, reconciled them by resolving the same into certain fundamental precepts that all Hindus can agree with, and showed their congruence with the then prevalent

scientific conclusions. This was unprecedented in that age when Hinduism was being subjected to a rigorous onslaught not only from vested interest groups keen on promoting exclusive belief structures, but also from the so-called reformers claiming to represent the Hindus' own interests. In addition to revving up the stuttering self-belief of the Hindu psyche, these talks served the more important purpose of holding before the



world religions a set of all-embracing, universal, philosophical principles capable of synthesising all seeming differences between them.

Marie Louise Burke, the great researcher who wrote her in-depth study on the impact that Swamiji had, and continues to have, on the Western mind through her six-volume magnum opus *Swami Vivekananda in the West: New Discoveries*, has this observation to make about this particular lecture:

Indeed, in this first statement of the Hindu religion that Swamiji made to the American public lay the seeds of all his subsequent teachings. That which he was later to develop and formulate in terms adapted to Western understanding and culture was all there; and perhaps in that moment not only was Hinduism created, but a new religion for the world was given its first enunciation in the West—a religion fulfilling the past, lighting up the future.<sup>2</sup>

### **Swamiji's Philosophical Presentation**

The philosophical presentations of Swamiji in the West generally followed a particular pattern:

a. When introducing to the Western mind the metaphysical world view of creation he always preferred the Sankhya system, where there is a clear-cut duality between Prakriti, Nature and Purusha, Soul. It is the view that from the unmanifested Pradhana or Prakriti, all effects, starting from the subtlest, universal, I-consciousness, *mahat*, to the mind and the senses, aligning with the subject and the grossest material objects perceived, have emerged. Though witnessing the play of Prakriti in the form of interactions between the subject and the object, the Purusha is detached; though animating the same in its creative dance, it is inactive. Also, both are eternal principles.

b. The next step in his presentation was to show that there is a God who permeates Prakriti through and through, a deviation from classical

Sankhya. To explain it employing the classical metaphor of the spider from the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*: 'Just as a spider weaves the web out of its own body and remains in it, even so, the one Lord, having projected the whole universe out of the threads of one's own Prakriti, remains in it and has covered with it'.<sup>3</sup>

c. The third step was to show that as the mind of the individual soul evolves, its vision of this one Lord becomes clearer and clearer.

d. And finally, at the climactic stages of his perorations, Swamiji always took his stand on the lofty terrains of non-duality, Advaita, where the individual soul, *jiva*, realises that whatever it had perceived of itself was in reality this one God; that whatever he had thought of as God was the glory of one's own inner Self, of the nature of absolute existence, consciousness, and bliss. And Prakriti, including one's body and mind, is recognised to be illusory or a wrong reading of this one absolute God.

This was the general pattern of Swamiji's lectures, though there were some exceptions.

### **The Tsunami Power of Hinduism that 'Sucked in, Absorbed, and Assimilated'**

At the outset itself Swamiji contrasts Hinduism with the other ancient faiths and points out that the reason for its longevity is its unique ability to accommodate within its fold, and in the final run, to absorb and assimilate into its vast body, sects and belief systems that seem opposed to it at first. Thus, Hinduism 'sucked in, absorbed, and assimilated' different thoughts.<sup>4</sup> Elsewhere, in his lecture titled 'The Ideal of a Universal Religion', he has explained the guiding principle behind this ability to assimilate.

Every religion expresses itself at three levels of philosophy, mythology, and rituals. The highest level is of philosophy where the ideals and goals of that religion are presented as abstruse



philosophical principles. The latter two are called lower not because of any in-built inferiority in the beliefs and practices constituting them. Their validity is also derived from their ability to coax spiritually untrained minds to understand and absorb those very subtle, abstruse spiritual truths declared in the philosophical section. Only because this process of assimilation is achieved indirectly through the narration of imaginative stories or through the performance of attractive rituals, the latter two are said to be lower. The more universal and impersonal these spiritual principles are, the more catholic would be the outlook of their votaries because the object of their search in their respective myths and rituals would be those impersonal principles that unify them with humanity and not divide them from one another. It is the catholicity and universality of these spiritual principles that precisely account for the long-standing vitality of Hinduism.

Again, these principles form the basis for the practice and development of the powers of yoga—the means of actualising these principles through inner experience. And this can be achieved through the development of irresistible power of will which, expressing itself in the external world, seeks to do good to humanity, irrespective of caste, creed, or clime, without the slightest intrusion of any selfish motive, through karma yoga. This very power of will, directed inwards, serves to bring one's inner powers under perfect control and thus make's one capable of directing and harnessing one's attentive powers to the perception of the deep spiritual mysteries within one's inner nature, through raja yoga.

A third way leading to the development of the power of yoga is through the refinement of emotions, directing them to the pursuit of an ideal of bliss infinitely superior to evanescent sense pleasures, through bhakti yoga. One can

also lead to the development of the power of abstract thinking, through which one learns to separate the Reality of one's own nature from the changing conditions of the mind, through jnana yoga. Thus, whatever maybe one's spiritual ideal, whatsoever the disciplinary path, once these universal principles along with the abovementioned processes of yoga as a means for their actualisation are recognised as forming the basis of their belief, all diversity in mythological narratives or ritualistic orientations are welcome. And it is the very presence of these vital elements in Hinduism that accounts for its dynamism. Now what are these philosophical elements? Swamiji goes on to enumerate them one by one.

### ***Vedas: 'The Accumulated Treasury of Spiritual Laws'***

There are different philosophical streams and devotional schools in Hinduism, each having its own unique view of and approach to Reality. Swamiji compares them to so many concentric circles each having a radius different from that of the other. The philosophical principles as well as the processes of yoga mentioned above, as a means of realising those principles, can be considered the center or reconciling point of the varying philosophical views equated to circles. The first principle of convergence among divergent beliefs is that the Vedas form their authority. It should be noted that Swamiji here includes what are traditionally considered as non-Vedic schools like Buddhism and Jainism also as parts of Hinduism and thus subject to the same rules of reconciliation as the others.

What are the Vedas? They are no books, but eternal, without a beginning or an end, spiritual laws discovered by rishis. Swamiji says that they are 'the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws' (ibid.). Let us see how Swamiji explains the same principle elsewhere:

Veda means the sum total of eternal truths; the Vedic Rishis experienced those truths; they can be experienced only by seers of the supersensuous ... That is why in the Vedas the term Rishi means 'the seer of the truth of the Mantras', and not any Brahmin with the holy thread hanging down the neck. The division of society into castes came about later on. Veda is of the nature of Shabda or of idea. It is but the sum total of ideas. Shabda, according to the old Vedic meaning of the term, is the subtle idea, which reveals itself by taking the gross form later on. So owing to the dissolution of the creation the subtle seeds of the future creation become involved in the Veda. ... All the created objects began to take concrete shape out of the Shabdas or ideas in the Veda. For in Shabda or idea, all gross objects have their subtle forms ... the Shabda-state of every object is its subtle state, and the things we see, hear, touch, or perceive in any manner are the gross manifestations of entities in the subtle or Shabda state. Just as we may speak of the effect and its cause. Even when the whole creation is annihilated, the Shabda, as the consciousness of the universe or the subtle reality of all concrete things, exists in Brahman as the cause. At the point of creative manifestation, this sum total of causal entities vibrates into activity, as it were, and as being the sonant, material substance of it all, the eternal, primal sound of 'Om' continues to come out of itself. And then from the causal totality comes out first the subtle image or Shabda-form of each particular thing and then its gross manifestation. Now that causal Shabda, or word-consciousness, is Brahman, and it is the Veda. This is the purport of Sayana (6.496-8).

Let us look at a verse in the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* supplementing Swamiji's above quotation. 'The supreme Lord first projected Brahma and then awakened the Vedas within him. May that very Lord awaken within me the knowledge of my real nature.'<sup>5</sup>

### **Kalpas or Cycles and the Creator-Creation Duality**

This is a concept that follows as a corollary of the above. Swamiji always emphasised the cyclical narrative of creation described in the Vedas in contrast to the linear narrative favoured by others, as evidenced by his statement, 'there never was a time when there was no creation'.<sup>6</sup> It was only a question of whether creation had taken an evolved form perceptible to the senses or it was involved as the sum total of ideas. Swamiji always preferred the use of words 'evolution' or 'projection' instead of 'creation' for the Sanskrit word *shrishti* and 'involution' or 'withdrawal' for its counter-positive *samhara*. The creator-god permeates and animates Nature throughout the stages of creation, yet remains apart from it as the uninvolved Witness. Also, both are eternal entities. As mentioned above, this duality is only presumed initially; this duality becomes more and more shadowy and is finally sublated as the vision of the jiva expands and reaches its climax. To quote Swamiji: 'Creation and creator are two lines, without beginning and without end, running parallel to each other. God is the ever-active providence, by whose power systems after systems are being evolved out of chaos, made to run for a time and again destroyed' (ibid.).

### **The Eternal Individual Soul and its Transmigration**

Intuitively everyone feels one's existence but one's self-awareness is inextricably mixed up with the changing conditions of the body and the mind. One at least is unable to reconcile with the thought that one's self-identity begins and ends with the body, whose self-doubt is poignantly expressed as 'Am I, then, nothing but a combination of material substances?' (ibid.). It is here that the Vedas step in and provide one with an alternative: 'I am a spirit living in a body. ...

this body ... will fall, but I shall go on living. I had also a past' (1.8). Two quotes, one from the *Katha Upanishad* and the other from the *Bhagavadgita* respectively are quoted here as examples: 'Though incorporeal, this self is stationed in this corporeal body.'<sup>7</sup> 'There never was a time when neither you, me, nor any of these kings were not there; nor will come a time when they will cease to be.'<sup>8</sup> Thus, the eternality of the soul is established on the basis of the Vedas. But the indirect knowledge of this eternality does not stop an individual soul from being subject to the law of transmigration, of being trapped in an ever-repeating loop of birth, continuance, growth, mutation, decay, and death.

Next, Swamiji goes on to explain the theory of reincarnation on which the law of transmigration is based.

We can see almost a one-to-one correspondence between the methodology adopted by Swamiji and the time-honoured *modus operandi* of the Vedantic tradition to back any metaphysical assumption by *shruti*, sacred text; *yukti*, reasoning based on the text; and *anubhuti*, the final and ultimate proof of inner experience that substantiates the above two. Also, Swamiji's metaphysical assumption closely resembles some mantras of the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad*<sup>9</sup> and *Kaushitaki Upanishad*<sup>10</sup> and his reasoning based on that assumption closely follows the arguments advanced by Acharya Shankara while commenting on an aphorism of *Brahma Sutra*<sup>11</sup> in support of the said texts. The salient features of Swamiji's explanation of the theory of reincarnation are as follows:

a. *The metaphysical assumption behind the theory of reincarnation*: The special cause for the transmigration of the jiva is merit and demerit accruing from the quality of past actions.

b. *The reasoning based on the abovementioned assumption*: God cannot be held responsible for

the inequalities suffered by the jivas because then the inadmissible dual charges of partiality and cruelty will come upon God, who then would become a 'partial' God subjecting creation to the 'cruel fiat of an all-powerful being'.<sup>12</sup> In other words, just as rain is only the general cause for the growth of seeds, which follow their own law of growth, even so is the causality of God for generating the physical and mental characteristics of the jivas and the diversities in their behaviour. The special cause, like the unique attributes of the seeds being responsible for the quality of the harvested grain, for the diversities in jivas' nature is their own good, bad, and mixed actions which, through the creation of merit, dharma and demerit, *adharma*, accounts for their transmigration.

Swamiji advances further reasoning and says that the theory of reincarnation provides a better 'scientific' explanation for 'inherited aptitude' than the then contemporary position of science that held the view that the patterns responsible for habits were physically transmitted from the cells of the parents to the child (*ibid.*). The thrust of Swamiji's argument is that aptitude has a physical and a mental aspect and the latter is independent of and just expresses itself through the former, as opposed to the view that the latter has evolved out of the former. The 'physicality' involved in the transmission of structures can be admitted, but the mental part is unique to every soul. Again, the genetic structures 'only mean the physical configuration, through which a particular mind alone can act in a particular way ... And a soul with a certain tendency would by the laws of affinity take birth in a body which is the fittest instrument for the display of that tendency' (1.8–9). Finally, the differences in behavioural patterns observable in newborns can be better explained by regular recurrence of appropriate experiences in previous births.

c. *Inner experience as the final proof for reincarnation*: Finally, Swamiji makes a bold appeal to the generation of an inner experience, spiritual experience based on the strengthening of moral-spiritual fibre of the conscious mind and not by dwelling on the unconscious, as the final clinching proof for reincarnation: 'Verification is the perfect proof of a theory, and here is the challenge thrown to the world by the Rishis. We have discovered the secret by which the very depths of the ocean of memory can be stirred up—try it and you would get a complete reminiscence of your past life' (1.9).

### ***The Immortality of the Soul***

Having stated the eternity of the soul on the basis of the Shrutis, Swamiji goes on to state its immortality on the basis of Gita:<sup>13</sup>

Him the sword cannot pierce—him the fire cannot burn—him the water cannot melt—him the air cannot dry. The Hindu believes that every soul is a circle whose circumference is nowhere, but whose centre is located in the body, and that death means the change of this centre from body to body. Nor is the soul bound by the conditions of matter. In its very essence it is free, unbounded, holy, pure, and perfect. But somehow or other it finds itself tied down to matter, and thinks of itself as matter.<sup>14</sup>

### ***The Immortal Soul and Misery***

Though the immortality of the soul is established on the basis of the scriptures, the fact remains that scriptural knowledge can neither nullify the uncertainty of transmigration or one's first-hand experience of physical-mental misery. There seems to be an unbridgeable gap between one's scriptural conclusions and experience. Thus, Swamiji formulates the question that seems to challenge the entire philosophical supposition of the Hindus: 'How can the perfect soul be deluded into the belief that it

is imperfect? ... how can the pure, the absolute, change even a microscopic particle of its nature?' (1.9–10).

We shall try to analyse Swamiji's answer to this question:

But the Hindu is sincere. He does not want to take shelter under sophistry. He is brave enough to face the question in a manly fashion; and his answer is: 'I do not know. I do not know how the perfect being, the soul, came to think of itself as imperfect, as joined to and conditioned by matter.' But the fact is a fact for all that. It is a fact in everybody's consciousness that one thinks of oneself as the body. The Hindu does not attempt to explain why one thinks one is the body. The answer that it is the will of God is no explanation. This is nothing more than what the Hindu says, 'I do not know' (1.10).

The Hindu analyses one's misery, traces it to actions done with ulterior motive, which again, are there only because of desires. What is the source of desire? The feeling of incompleteness that we have within ourselves, which again, is nothing but a shadowy, hazy, incomplete knowledge about ourselves. The answer, 'I do not know' is the most direct and honest expression for this incomplete knowledge that the jiva has about itself. Also, we can presume that the perfection of the soul presented by the scriptures is not experienced by us because of this obstruction in the form of ignorance, intuitively felt and presented by the scriptures.

This ignorance is not presented in the scriptures as something to be known as Brahman. The means of knowledge like direct perception and inference cannot reveal it because that would make it a positive entity and the supreme knowledge banishes and eradicates it without leaving any traces whatsoever; thus 'indistinguishability' becomes an essential feature of this ignorance; but nothing stops us from 'presuming' on the



basis of our experience—of the effect in the form of misery—and scriptures that this ignorance is blocking our direct experience of the perfect soul. It is almost as if Swamiji is encapsulating the entire gamut of philosophical conclusions about maya and *avidya*, which have come out of this 'I don't know'.

One final aspect of Swamiji's response remains to be analysed. What are the qualities of 'manliness' and boldness involved in this 'I don't know' response of the Hindu? The wholehearted eagerness of the Hindu to transform one's conviction about scriptural conclusions into the direct and immediate experience of Reality and thus banish with disdain this shadowy 'I don't know' marks the bold and 'manly' approach of the Hindu to religion. Let us see how Swamiji himself explains this later on:

The Hindu does not want to live upon words and theories. If there are existences beyond the ordinary sensuous existence, he wants to come face to face with them. If there is a soul in him which is not matter, if there is an all-merciful universal Soul, he will go to Him direct. He must see Him, and that alone can destroy all doubts. So the best proof a Hindu sage gives about the soul, about God, is: 'I have seen the soul; I have seen God.' And that is the only condition of perfection. The Hindu religion does not consist in struggles and attempts to believe a certain doctrine or dogma, but in realising—not in believing, but in being and becoming (1.13).

### ***The Jiva's Cry for Freedom and the Divine Response***

There are two conflicting voices echoing within every individual urging one to take one's life in two diametrically opposite directions. One voice, slightly louder, asks us to reconcile with the life of bondage, to forget ourselves in our own little world of attachments and sense pleasures and

thus drown out the higher voice. But there is also a persistent, perhaps slightly feebler, inner voice totally opposed to the former, that forces us to struggle on, to free ourselves from every kind of bondage—physical, mental, moral, and spiritual. But the vast majority among us succumb to the former voice drowning out the call of the higher one to lead a more purposeful life. One major reason for this maybe that the spirit of realisation remains dormant in the so-called custodians of religion and thus they fail to convey the directness of spiritual realisation to the common person.

But at the crossroads of the transition from one age to the other comes a person who, represents within oneself, the fullest extent to which human spiritual potentialities can be actualised. Such a person comes armed with a divine command to authoritatively awaken this inner voice and thus offset and balance the inordinate, abnormal hankering for power, pelf, and pleasure that humanity is in danger of sinking into, misguided by the vagaries of the age. Swamiji's was such an awareness and voice. From the roaring blazing torch within him flew the initial spark that lit the path of spiritual striving to be trodden by the modern person. But the ignition point of that spark also required a location in space and time.

One can definitely say that the lectures Swamiji delivered at Chicago provided that initial ignition and the audience there were the first to catch the sparks flying. All this is told here only to better appreciate the next topic, the supreme assurance to humanity, the divine promise, which Swamiji holds forth at his inspired, eloquent best. It was not a mere extempore translation of the inspired words of the rishi of the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad*.<sup>15</sup> It was as if along with the words, the very realisation of the ancient rishi was being reawakened in this modern

rishi and was being transmitted to his hearers:

‘Hear, ye children of immortal bliss! even ye that reside in higher spheres! I have found the Ancient One who is beyond all darkness, all delusion: knowing Him alone you shall be saved from death over again.’ ‘Children of immortal bliss’—what a sweet, what a hopeful name! Allow me to call you, brethren, by that sweet name—heirs of immortal bliss—yea, the Hindu refuses to call you sinners. Ye are the Children of God, the sharers of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings. Ye divinities on earth—sinners! It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature. Come up, O lions, and shake off the delusion that you are sheep; you are souls immortal, spirits free, blest and eternal; ye are not matter, ye are not bodies; matter is your servant, not you the servant of matter.<sup>16</sup>

There are a couple of points worth noting here about Swamiji’s abovementioned utterance:

1. At this point Swamiji is not interested in a philosophical definition of the relation between jiva and Brahman—whether the former is related to, a part of, or non-different from, the latter. What is of primary importance to a spiritual aspirant is the desire for mukti, *mumuksha*, and one’s philosophical proclivities are of secondary importance.

2. Equally important is Swamiji’s clarion call to his hearers to boldly unburden themselves of all thoughts of sin because the idea of sin is rooted in the delusion that we are bodies, of which fear and miseries are the symptoms. Delusion cannot cure delusion. Only the continuous reminder of an innate perfection can cure us of our delusion, thus emphasising a leonine, ‘manly’, fearless approach in our spiritual pursuit.

### **Praying to the Immanent God**

The supreme Reality of the universe can be thought of in three different contexts. As the transcendent, absolute, abstract essence of this

universe, it is Brahman. That very Brahman thought of as the inmost reality of the jiva is the Self-Atman principle. When the same is thought of as the animating and coordinating principle of the diverse functioning of the universe, it is the supreme functionary, Ishvara, the author of the creation, preservation, and destruction of this universe. Echoing the *Taittiriya Upanishad*,<sup>17</sup> Swamiji next describes Ishvara’s immanence in nature as the pure, formless, all-pervasive Reality: ‘At the head of all these laws, in and through every particle of matter and force, stands One “by whose command the wind blows, the fire burns, the clouds rain, and death stalks upon the earth.”’<sup>18</sup>

Let us see another verse from the *Shvetashvatara Upanishad* speaking of Brahman’s immanence in soul, which complements the above idea of its immanence in Nature: ‘He is the all-pervasive, innermost Self of all, the one, luminous deity hidden in all beings, the regulator of all their actions, the abode of all, the witness, the giver of relative consciousness to all, at the same time devoid of all limitations and qualities.’<sup>19</sup>

There are many prayers to Ishvara:

Thou art my mother, father, dearest relative, friend, essence of knowing and wealth to be strived for, O lord of lords, thou art my all in all.<sup>20</sup>

Thou art spiritual lustre, bestow on me a fraction of that radiance. Thou art virility, bestow on me manliness. Thou art source of all strength, give me strength. Thou art the energy embodying the power of self-control, bestow on me the energy to practise the same. Thou embody the spirit of righteous indignation, bestow on me the same so that I may take a stand against perceived injustices. Thou bears the burdens of the whole universe, help me bear the little burden of this life.<sup>21</sup>

Swamiji introduces ‘the heart to God and ... hands to work’ philosophy of the Gita, which

teaches us the art of transforming our whole life into a prayer.<sup>22</sup>

### **God Seen Through an Avatara**

The Gita invests the all-pervading, all-merciful, all-powerful, pure, formless aspect of God with a human form. Through the human form, God becomes, as it were, a constant divine reminder to the human being like the ringing of an alarm clock. This makes it much easier for the human being to love God through worship, the exclusive dedication of all thoughts, words, and deeds. Sri Krishna says in the Gita: 'To those who have dedicated all actions to me, having accepted me as the supreme and who meditates on me with single-minded concentration, to them who thus have their minds absorbed in me, I become, without delay, their deliverer from the sea of the world fraught with death.'<sup>23</sup>

This is the divine promise vouchsafed to the human beings by an incarnation of God. How, again, is the incarnation different from the ordinary human being? Sri Krishna says: 'Though I am aware of myself as the unborn Self and am of undiminishing knowledge and the Lord of all beings, still by subjugating my nature I appear to be born by my own maya' (4.6). Maya or the cosmic illusion being Lord's own, the Lord is not affected by it, just like the poison of the snake does not affect the snake, though it may affect others who are bitten by it. Swamiji presents elsewhere this very concept of incarnation as 'the special manifestation of the Absolute' and the 'tint of humanity'<sup>24</sup> through which alone the Absolute is capable of being known.

Next, we will see how the Gita teaches us the art of worship by teaching us the process of learning to dedicate all our thoughts, words, and deeds to the object of our prayer, an incarnation of the Lord. The worship of the Lord through

thought, word, and deed leads to love for the Lord. In fact, we can say that worship of and love for Lord mutually feed on each other strengthening both and prayer stands as their basis.

### **Gita's Message of Evolving Bhakti**

The Gita is all about how unselfish work evolves into worship, worship culminates in the awareness of God as the Reality permeating all our subject-object interactions, and how following the trail of the resultant divine love, one's individuality is totally effaced in the transcendental awareness of God. This evolution can be seen in four phases:

a. *Work and worship*: Karma yoga admits that the ordinary, uninitiated person would always be driven to work motivated by attachments, pleasure seeking, and hankering for rewards. Therefore, Gita teaches the aspirant in the beginning of spiritual life, to give up hankering for results by surrendering them to God.<sup>25</sup>

b. *Work as worship*: Giving up the hankering for results evolves into the development of the capacity of being unmoved or unaffected by the good and bad results of actions (2.49). Correspondingly, the power of non-attachment also increases. With the effacement of expectation for results, the 'mine-ness' associated with one's personality also loosens its hold, while the 'I' remains as the servant of God doing all work for the love of God, the Master (3.30, 9.27). Swamiji says in *Karma Yoga*:

First destroy the tendency to project this tentacle of selfishness, and when you have the power of checking it, hold it in and do not allow the mind to get into the ways of selfishness. Then you may go out into the world and work as much as you can. Mix everywhere, go where you please; you will never be contaminated with evil. This is called "Vairagya", dispassion or non-attachment. ... Non-attachment is the basis of all the Yogas.<sup>26</sup>

At this stage work itself has evolved into worship.

c. *Loving God is worship*: In the next stage, the power of non-attachment reaches its zenith when even this 'I' is taken over by God. The aspirant becomes aware that the I-consciousness, faculties of body and mind through which this 'I' manifests, and the world of objects, all having come out of God is permeated by the same through and through.<sup>27</sup> At this stage the aspirant's spiritual discipline, call it either work or worship, becomes just an act of self-surrender to the Lord. The aspirant just submits to divine love, stands apart and lets God act, recognising that the ultimate purpose of worship would be reached when God removes even the least trace of 'I', leaving the glory of God alone in its stead.

d. *From loving God to supreme knowledge*: The rosy dawn of divine love is the forerunner for the inevitable grace of God that will melt the last traces of ego, leaving the untrammelled glory of God in its stead. 'Through supreme devotion you will know who I am and to what extent I am. And thus, knowing me in truth one forthwith dissolves in me' (18.55). On this subject, Swamiji says:

And this bondage can only fall off through the mercy of God, and this mercy comes on the pure. So purity is the condition of His mercy. How does that mercy act? He reveals Himself to the pure heart; the pure and the stainless see God, yea, even in this life; then and then only all the crookedness of the heart is made straight. Then all doubt ceases. He is no more the freak of a terrible law of causation. This is the very centre, the very vital conception of Hinduism. ... And what becomes of a man when he attains perfection? He lives a life of bliss infinite. He enjoys infinite and perfect bliss, having obtained the only thing in which man ought to have pleasure, namely God, and enjoys the bliss with God.<sup>28</sup>

Thus, having capped his enumeration of the convergent universal principles of the diverse Hindu sects with the realisation of God by jiva and the resultant state of freedom from bondage, mukti, that it enjoys, Swamiji introduces the philosophical vision of Advaita Vedanta in order to best explain how the self that realises stands vis-à-vis God and universe.

### ***Realising the Non-dual Nature of Self***

According to Advaita, God in essence is absolute existence, knowledge, and bliss, which again as the abstract, absolute, unified essence of the universe is called the 'vast, ever-expanding, infinite, Brahman'. This Brahman is the true self of a person. Thus, realising God means realising Brahman as one's true self.

Before concluding we shall see the rationale behind Swamiji's preference for the non-dualistic approach to Reality vis-à-vis the views of other Vedantic schools:

1. By presenting Brahman as the true self of a person, the search for Self becomes the quest for 'that by knowing which everything else becomes known'.<sup>29</sup> This results in the spiritual search for the Self, breaking out from the confines of being 'within oneself', spreading out and encompassing the whole of humanity because Brahman is the Self of all. Such an outlook opens up the possibilities of all kinds of well-intentioned activities getting uplifted to the status of worship. This in turn leads to the spiritual, moral transmutation of one's character through the yogic processes backed by the attitudes of bhakti, jnana, or karma; by one, or more, or all of them.

2. To gain the knowledge of our true Self as the Self of all, the life as we know it has to be given up. As Swamiji says, 'Non-attachment is the basis of all the Yogas'.<sup>30</sup> All sects of Hinduism hold aloft the principle of self-renunciation



or abnegation. This ideal of self-renunciation is pushed to its logical conclusion only in this philosophy. That conclusion Swamiji expresses with his own vivid but uncompromising choice of words as the destruction of 'this miserable little prison-individuality' (1.14). The destruction of this individuality takes place in two stages.

a. The first stage is the expansion of individuality into the universal; of awakening to the experience of the immanent, all-pervasive aspect of the Reality as permeating all our subject-object transactions.

b. The next stage is when one surrenders to the sense of God's immanence and just submits to the pull of the resultant divine love, with the conviction that the climax of this 'pull' would be the total effacement of the last traces of one's false 'individuality' along with its cause, the shadowy 'I don't know'. Then nothing else remains to obstruct one's experience of oneself as the transcendental Self, absolute existence, knowledge, bliss. Even when the absorption is broken, the knowledge gained thereupon transfigures the personality just as the proverbial touch of the philosopher's stone transforms even the dullest metal into gold. The false becomes true, the human becomes divine, the bound becomes free, the individual turns into an expression of the play of the universal.

c. And, finally, the pursuit of such a Self, conceived as Brahman, the spiritual essence of the universe diversified by the illusory principles of names and forms, has a particular resonance with the approach of material sciences that also stretches itself in its attempt to find a unified theory which will accommodate all their other theories.

We conclude with Swamiji's invoking of this transcendental experience:

Therefore, to gain this infinite universal individuality, this miserable little prison-individuality must go. Then alone can death cease when

I am one with life, then alone can misery cease when I am one with happiness itself, then alone can all errors cease when I am one with knowledge itself; and this is the necessary scientific conclusion. Science has proved to me that physical individuality is a delusion, that really my body is one little continuously changing body in an unbroken ocean of matter; and Advaita is the necessary conclusion with my other counterpart, soul (ibid.).

PB

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26. *Complete Works*, 1.101.
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# ***Unsupported Eremitical Contemplative Asceticism***

**Eric S Fallick**

**W**E FIND OURSELVES separated from the Absolute, the One, the Good and trapped in the cycle of repeated birth and death in individuated sensate existence in space-time, in samsara, in becoming, with all its attendant and intrinsic misery and pain. Under these circumstances, the only at all sane and joyful thing to do is to strive single-mindedly and exclusively, as much as possible, to attain release from the cycle of reincarnation, to attain moksha, and reunion with the Absolute, to re-become the One. How is this to be done? There is only one way, that of thorough renunciation of the world and exclusive devotion to asceticism and contemplation, as incomprehensible and incredible and uncongenial as this may be

to the deluded worldlings of this modern kali yuga where the whole idea of true renunciation and contemplative asceticism has almost been completely lost and so few are left who really understand and are willing to follow the path.

What does this renunciation and practice entail? There are some essential and indispensable minimum requirements. Celibacy or brahmacharya, literally and completely and in its fullest and broadest sense, is a first requirement and dividing line from the worldly life. Essential also is vegetarianism, or preferably, veganism. This includes not only not eating any animals or anything derived from animals, but also non-harming or ahimsa in all respects, including not wearing leather, not using any animal products, not killing insects

and, in general, not harming or killing any sentient beings at all, human or animal, in any way as much as possible. Also necessary is complete teetotalism or abstinence from alcohol or any other intoxicants or intoxicating non-medicinal drugs of any sort. Complete honesty in one's speech and dealings is, of course, necessary, as contrary as it actually runs to the ways of the world. One also should not earn one's living or gain necessary worldly survival items by any means that harm other beings physically, morally, or spiritually.

Being completely devoted to spiritual practice, one should avoid attending worldly entertainment, watching television, movies, and the like. One should also avoid attending worldly social events, engaging in idle worldly talk, and so on, as much as possible in one's individual circumstances. In general, the principle is to be totally and exclusively devoted to and engaged in spiritual practice and study, beyond what is minimally necessary to maintain this psycho-physical existence until we can be rid of it in final liberation, and to avoid all worldly things, activities, and engagements. The individual needs to work out the exact details of what to do in each situation and in their own particular circumstances with understanding, sincerity, and discernment and in accordance with the essential principle of renunciation and the desire to be solely devoted to attaining release and reunion. An extensive or exhaustive list of individual detailed rules is unnecessary and ineffective and only leads to legalism and self-deception and obsessive-compulsiveness.

Established and continually further establishing oneself in full renunciation as the practice progresses, doing the best one can and always working for the renunciant ideal in accordance with the necessities of one's circumstances and minimum psycho-physical survival, study and meditative reading are also important and valuable parts of the path. As a Platonist, I, of course, consider

the *Dialogues* of Plato and the *Enneads* of Plotinus—and, allegorically understood, the *Odyssey* of Homer—as the principal texts for reading and study, but much can also be learned from the different texts of different systems. In general, I think that wide study and working knowledge of the different ascetic, renunciant, monastic, contemplative, and mystical spiritual systems of the world is quite helpful and useful, especially in the circumstances of the present time. Practitioners of other contemplative ascetic systems will naturally take the texts of their own system as their basic and most essential reading, but will, hopefully, supplement that with some reading in other systems as seems appropriate. To be able to read the essential texts of one's own system in their original language, though a non-trivial endeavour to say the least, is also helpful as translations cannot be relied upon and are always missing something.

With renunciation and knowledge, one can devote oneself to the actual practice of formal sitting in contemplation. This is the central practice and focus of the contemplative ascetic and the core and thrust of the effort towards the Absolute and getting out of samsara and is how the contemplative ascetic spends the greater part of one's time apart from all the necessary activities for psycho-physical survival. As a Platonist, I, of course, practise and counsel Platonist contemplation practice, and have described this in detail elsewhere,<sup>1</sup> but the practitioners of other systems will, of course, practise contemplation or meditation according to their own systems. It is important that they have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the practice of contemplation in their own systems and of their own texts on contemplation. All the details of and an extensive description of or detailed instructions for the actual contemplation or meditation practice, for the sadhana or yoga per se, can't be gone into here, but it is important that the practitioner be

quite knowledgeable and discerning about the contemplative practice of one's system.

Hopefully, a reasonably clear picture has been given of the proper renunciant and contemplative ascetic life and what it entails. It is the life that is engaged with and involved with the world and worldly activities of any and every sort only to the minimum extent absolutely necessary to maintain the psycho-physical organism—and that always done only strictly in accord with the principles of morality, honesty, and non-harming—and totally and solely and sincerely devoted exclusively in intention and concern and, as much as possible, in deed to spiritual, ascetic, and contemplative practice to attain liberation from becoming and re-union with the Absolute.

Something, however, more may be said about its practical implementation in the circumstances of the present day. People, as another symptom of *samsara* and the delusion associated with it, tend to see renunciation and contemplative asceticism in terms of institutions, institutionalised monasticism, rituals, initiations, titles, uniforms, merit badges, and the like. This is, of course, particularly and obviously and necessarily the case in terms of organised coenobitical monasticism. Eremitical monasticism has always tended less in this direction, has usually been the original less structured form from which coenobitical monasticism has eventually evolved and has often later even been associated with a rejection of institutionalised forms and an attempt to return to original ideals, but the same tendencies tend to come in people's perceptions here also.

In traditional societies, there has usually been at least some sort of niche or place and respect for renunciants and eremitical renunciants, but this is largely gone in the modern world. Platonism, while being the purest, most austere, most rigorous, and most otherworldly of renunciant and ascetic systems, has never had an institutionalised

monastic structure and has never become an institutionalised religion for the many. Thus, each Platonist contemplative ascetic and renunciant has always had to work out the particular and practical circumstances and logistical arrangements of one's eremitical renunciant contemplative ascetic life and practice on one's own, or with whatever few fellow travellers one might in some cases be fortunate enough to find, on a sort of ad hoc basis, following and in strict adherence to the renunciant principles such as outlined above with care and discernment relying on one's own developed understanding in one's particular time and place and circumstances. One has often or generally had to do this without any of the financial, material, logistical, moral, social, psychological, or emotional support or props of the monastic institutions, coenobitical or eremitical, and institutionalised systems. Thus, this may provide a particularly apt model for implementing eremitical contemplative asceticism and renunciation in the adverse and unsupported time, place, and circumstances of the present day.

In the atomised, anonymous, urban, modern world, if one has sufficient devotion, determination, resolve, sincerity, understanding and discernment, it is possible to practise devotedly and fully as an eremitical renunciant and contemplative ascetic alone and incognito and without support in the midst of a city. One can try to find a job or work of right livelihood to just earn the necessary minimum subsistence level income with a minimum of distraction. One can try to find simple minimum housing to rent even if it means sharing with worldlings while not doing anything they do and living only one's contemplative renunciant life. One can obtain and prepare simple food in a manner requiring a minimum amount of time and attention, considering only maintenance of the body and health, not taste. One can be purely celibate or maintain



brahmacharya surrounded by pornographic and sex-obsessed society and culture. One can be vegan and non-harming surrounded by interspecies cannibals and killers. One can be a teetotaler with drinkers, smokers, and so forth all around. One can abstain completely from entertainment, including the ubiquitous electronic entertainment among those, who know little else.

And so forth—one can be solely concerned with transcending this world and with the higher supra-sensory realities among worldlings, who know nothing beyond the senses and the fleeting phantoms of this world. It is, of course, very difficult to do this, especially without any kind of support at all and especially in the procrustean modern society that has no place or respect for renunciants and presents all sorts of obstacles and difficulties to and discrimination against any who don't fit into the norms of society. It presents all sorts of logistical headaches and great emotional and psychological hardship and loneliness—as the true renunciant life always does—but it is, at present, perhaps the most feasible and spiritually effective and viable option for pursuing the true wholly dedicated contemplative ascetic way and release from becoming, and this is all that really matters. As an Ancient Greek saying goes, 'noble and beautiful things are difficult'.

Again, the principle, whatever the particular details of practical implementation for a given individual in a given time and place, is to totally renounce this world and the things of the senses as much as possible outwardly and inwardly in all respects and solely and exclusively as much as possible devote oneself in every way, in intention, desire and deed, to striving for reunion with the Absolute and release from samsara. One must turn both the love and eye of the soul completely around from this world of the senses and becoming to the One or the Good and bring all one's life and actions and attitudes around in

accord with this to the exact opposite of that of the worldlings and the world around one. This must be done even while all the time attending to the burdensome necessities of maintaining the psycho-physical organism until we can be rid of it and even if one is without any support at all—financial, physical, logistical, moral, spiritual, emotional, social, institutional, or psychological—in the quest. There simply is no other possible way to go and the thought of just wallowing in samsara in this and future births like all the worldlings around one cannot be entertained even for an instant.

PB

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Kate Tannatt Woods

NOTHING WAS KNOWN till the spring of 1950 about Swami Vivekananda's stays at Salem in the US, let alone about his host and her family. At that point of time a curious advertisement for sale of a trunk and a walking stick reportedly belonging to Swamiji came up in a magazine dealing with antiques. Someone brought this unique information to the notice of a student of Vedanta at the Vedanta Society of Northern California. Those articles were instantly sent for, and correspondence began to unearth the history in background. Such exchanges were made with one Mrs Helen Tyson Woods, who initially had put the said advertisement. This was how with invaluable fragments of anecdotes and indelible memories of a long past that the world could learn that during late

## Kate Tannatt Woods: The Chosen Woman of Her Century

Somenath Mukherjee

August of 1893 Swamiji had been to the Woods's house at Salem, as well as about his sudden unannounced revisit there on a later day when he gave his valuable possessions to the Woods family as a mark of his love and gratitude.

In fact, as we know, it had been the adversities he faced immediately on reaching Chicago, which took Swamiji away to a few New England cities and villages in Massachusetts before he went back to that city again and staged his epoch-making appearance at the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893. During this diversion lasting less than a month, he came across scores of people, interacted freely with many of them, gave lectures, both public and parlour, while concurrently enjoying moments of closeness and fun, when some of them lovingly took him within their family. The first in line had been Katherine A Sanborn of Breezy Meadows, Metcalfe; followed by Mary Tappan Wright, the wife of Professor John Henry Wright, with whom Swamiji lived for two glorious days as their guest at Annisquam, Gloucester, where the Wrights were vacationing. Kate Tannatt Woods came next; she hosted Swamiji in her residence at Salem for about a week in August-September 1893. Like the two ladies who gave shelter to Swamiji before her, Kate Woods too did play her role at an appropriate moment and manner, which justifiably earned her immortality

in the history of Swamiji. And when Swamiji left the Woods family of two, herself, and her young son, Prince, he left his staff, trunk, and blanket which till then accompanied him since he left India. The Woods were told that Swamiji would revisit them soon and eventually take back his possessions. Swamiji did visit the Woods a little later than he wished to, but he did not take back his things. Instead, a few warm words that he said justifying his generous gesture displayed his love for the Woods family. But before we learn what happened during Swamiji's stay with the Woods, as also when he revisited them later, we must find out how Mrs Woods first came in contact with Swamiji and invited him to her house.

## 2

Kate Tannatt Woods had been a friend of Katherine Sanborn. And when the latter wrote letters to many of her distinguished friends to meet Swamiji during his stay with her in August 1893, Mrs Woods responded to her call and came from her home at Salem to meet Swamiji at Breezy Meadows, Metcalfe. Before she left, Kate Woods invited Swamiji to Salem to be a guest in her house and impart a lecture before the members of a social organisation and may be elsewhere too, if possible. In fact, we now know that immediately after getting Swamiji's consent to visit her place, Kate Woods went back and convened an executive committee meeting of her club on 24 August 1893 when Swamiji was still at Breezy Meadows. The outcome of the meeting reads: 'It was decided to have post cards sent to the members, announcements read from the local church pulpits on Sunday and twenty-five cents admission charged to non-members attending the meeting.'<sup>1</sup> This was how on 28 August Swamiji left Annisquam in the morning and travelled 15 miles to reach Salem on the same day. He stayed with the Woods till leaving for Saratoga Springs, New York, on 4 September 1893.

During those days, apart from when his lectures or else took him beyond, he remained with his host in her house. This obviously allowed him a more or less close acquaintance with Mrs Woods, as is displayed in the two letters Swamiji later wrote to her on October 10 and November 19 in 1893. In these letters we find that Mrs Woods also wrote to Swamiji, and the underlying warmth of their association is apparent here in his second letter: 'My love for you, my kind friend, and your noble son is all the same whether I write pretty often or not.'<sup>2</sup>

Readers may remember the mounting engagements that came on the heels of his growing fame following the Parliament; this hardly allowed Swamiji to exchange personal pleasantries with people who endeared him during his New England orbit. An instance is here in his earnest words to Mrs Woods as the post script to the above letter: 'If you have the occasion to write to Miss Sanborn and others of our friends in the east, kindly give them my deepest respects' (ibid.). This somehow displays the unique relationship that grew between Swamiji and Mrs Woods during those few days he had been with her. And if we look a little closer as to who exactly Mrs Kate Tannatt Woods was, we shall see that their mutual experience and inclinations acted as an instant accelerator in making them interested in each other. Incidentally, while looking at her life before she met Swamiji we will get an idea as to how she, with her personality and multihued experience in life, might have influenced Swamiji in enriching his social views, which later enabled him to pursue what had always been in his mind: to ameliorate the downtrodden of his motherland.

## 3

When Kate Tannatt Woods (1835 [elsewhere 36 or 38]–1910) went to meet Swamiji in Metcalfe, she was in her late fifties and living as a widow for



nine years with her son Prince, a twenty-three-year-old youth studying medicine. She was a remarkable woman in many ways. We may first begin from her family.

Though the exact time of his arrival in the US is yet unknown, it had been the pleasure of hunting, which brought James Tannatt, an ancestor of Kate Tannatt Woods, to the US. And he never went back, eventually earning the nickname, 'Tannatt the Hunter'. The name 'Tannatt' was adopted sometime in the sixteenth century from the river 'Tanad' or 'Tannat' in Montgomeryshire, Wales, by members of the gentry as their family name. Kate's father, James S Tannatt, was born in Boston around 1800 and later moved to New York for working there as editor in various publications. He married Mary Gilmour, born in 1802 and a descendant of Sir John Gilmour of Craigmiller Castle fame of Edinburgh, Scotland. So far we know yet, besides Kate the youngest one, they had three more sons, Thomas, John, and Henry.

Kate was a promising student, but the untimely death of her father brought an interruption to her studies, when Mary Tannatt moved with her children to live with her eldest daughter,

a half-sister of Kate and married to a physician, in New Hampshire. When the physician was removed to Manchester-by-the-sea, Mary too accompanied him with her children but for a short while before permanently settling at Salem, which offered more opportunities to raise her family. Here Kate began to work as a teacher in a public school, though delicate health disallowed her to accept higher responsibility that she rightfully deserved and had been offered. In fact, her childhood had been a restricted one owing to a chronic rheumatic trouble; this had drawn her more to reading, music, and fine arts. Though the undying fame later came through her literary talents; she frequently contributed to newspapers and magazines ever since her childhood, which finally earned her a popular name for fifty years in American literature. Her various books include poems, short stories, books for the young, and novels. To find out how Kate's name still rings in the book-world, we may cite a few instances.

Today the online giant *Amazon* of the US mentions this while selling her book entitled *That Dreadful Boy: An American Novel*: 'This work has been selected by scholars as being culturally important, and is part

of the knowledge base of civilization as we know it.'<sup>3</sup> And according to the largest library catalogue online, *OCLC WorldCat*, the wealth of Kate's writings available today includes '53 works in 115 publications in 1 language and 760 library holdings'.<sup>4</sup> To avoid diversion, we shall add only one more instance as to how Kate's contribution and fame as a writer still reigns today from her obituary in the *New York Times* of 13 July 1910:

Lynde Street, Salem Today





'Mrs Woods was a prolific writer, and had been connected with the editorial departments of several magazines and newspapers. Among the best known of her twenty or more books are "A Fair Maid of Marblehead" and "That Dreadful Boy". What the Obituary added next caught our immediate interest: 'As a clubwoman Mrs. Woods was best known. She was one of the founders and first officers of the General Federation of Women's Clubs and one of the founders of the Massachusetts State Federation of Women's Clubs.'"

Here we find a clear reference to Kate Wood's leading role in the American Women Club movement. This obviously needs a closer look, for it had its enormous impact on the US society and Swamiji observed its phenomenal influence. But this has to wait awhile, as we must include a little more of her personal life. Her talent as a writer allowed Mrs Woods to earn for her family in the time of need. First it had been the untimely death of her father in 1845, which put the family into financial constraint; then, when she had to manage her family with a war-injured husband, and later when he was no more, during those times her ability as a writer obviously came as a rescue.

But the beginning never showed signs of such untoward consequences. George Henry Woods had been a Salem native, graduated at Brown University, before earning his degree from Harvard Law School. When he married Kate, George was practising law, which he first started in Minneapolis before moving to Minnesota. Later he went into a mercantile career as a grain commission dealer. When the civil war broke out he entered the military service and was mustered on 29 April 1861. Joining as a First Lieutenant, he later rose in ranks till sustaining a serious injury during a battle in 1862. He was honourably discharged as a Captain on 11 July 1865. Incidentally, during the funeral of President Abraham

Lincoln in April 1865, George Woods had been one of the honoured bodyguards.

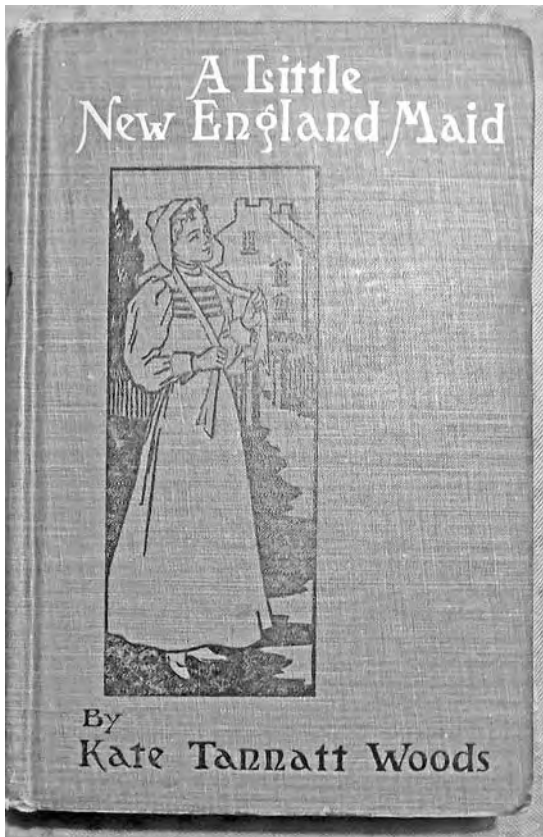
Persons close to Mr Woods were always impressed by his appearance and manners, which unmistakably displayed a man of culture and refinement. But his injury in the war, as well as the post-war impact, never allowed him a healthy and smooth life. To earn a living and to live at places more or less approving to his ailing health, George Woods had to move with his family from time to time. And it was since 30 September 1884 when George was no more that Kate alone had to manage everything. But even while George was around, she never was confined to her family chores. It is known that when George went to the front, Kate accompanied him with her children to the camp and nursed and cared for the sick and wounded with other camp wives.

Here we may briefly write about Kate's five children, three sons, and two daughters. The first was Arthur, born on 9 January 1859. A Master of Mechanical Engineering from Cornell University in 1890, he taught as a professor at the Universities of Illinois (1887-91) and St Louis in Missouri (1891-2), and also authored some books on his subject. And significantly, it had been merely seven months before Swamiji visited his mother, when Arthur left this world, survived by his wife with no child. The second, third, and fourth children, Harry, Katie, and Samuel died at their infancy.

Dr Prince Tannatt Woods, born in 1870, was the fifth child, who lived with his mother when Swamiji visited Salem. He first tried as a learner of printing trade, later worked as a reporter for the *Boston Globe* between 1886 and 1890 before



Kate Tannatt Woods



The Cover of A Little New England Maid in 1898

entering the Boston University School of Medicine. Prince had his MB in 1894 and MD in 1895. He began his practice in September 1895 in and around Salem, which soon earned him enduring success. He also gained reputation as a popular writer of books and articles on semi-scientific books on poultry and kindred subjects, as well as short stories. Much social and political recognition came to him too. Prince Woods married Helen Eunice Tyson of Colora, Maryland, in September 1895. She was born to Samuel and Janney or Jane in 1876; the history of Swamiji is much indebted to her memory in threading together what followed the family's short association with Swamiji. They had two sons and one daughter. Of them, Richard George, born in Salem in 1898, was killed in a railroad train in

1906; Robert Prince was born in Buffalo, New York in 1903; and in 1907 Dorothy Tyson was born in Middleton, Massachusetts.

#### 4

The adversities that confronted Kate Tappan Woods ever since her early childhood had etched out of her a strong and resolute woman, who on both domestic and social fronts fulfilled her commitments in exemplary ways. To look at her social roles, we must first come up with an interesting history, which to a great extent had moulded the latter-day social life in the US. This would also allow us a glimpse into the social milieu when Swamiji moved around there. Let us read from a book entitled *Society's Sisters: Stories of Women Who Fought for Social Justice in America*: 'On April 19, 1868, the New York Press Club held a lavish dinner at Delmonico's Restaurant in New York City. The dinner honored Charles Dickens. This was Dickens's second visit to America and most likely his last, for the popular British author was seriously ill.'<sup>6</sup> In fact, Dickens had no more than two years to live since this date. The text continues:

Jane Cunningham Croly was a journalist. Her pen name was Jennie June, and her articles appeared in many magazines in New York City, Boston, and Baltimore. Her Husband, David, was also an editor and writer. Both were members of the New York Press Club. However, only David received an invitation to attend the Dickens Banquet. Jane Croly attempted to purchase a ticket to the banquet, but the Press Club refused to allow women to attend even the after-dinner toasts and speeches. Finally, three days before the event, the Press Club relented. They would admit women on one condition: They must sit behind a curtain, unseen by the gentlemen in the audience and unseen, as well, by the guest of honor, Mr Dickens (ibid.).

The force of her fury and indignation

notwithstanding, and the gradual backlash it slowly brought upon great many righteous women, perhaps none could understand this was when a great movement was in the making; the chapter continues with what Mrs Croly decided:

'We will form a club of our own,' she declared. 'We will give a banquet to ourselves, make all the speeches ourselves, and not invite a single man.' ... Croly proposed a women's movement for self-improvement. She called her new club Sorosis. The word comes from the Latin *soror*, or sister. Sorosis had another meaning—a flower with many blooms. Sorosis would help women to bloom by presenting lectures and discussions on the arts and education. Sorosis would teach women to think for themselves, rather than getting their opinions from their husbands and fathers. Croly admitted the idea was not only new, 'it was startling'. ... The time had indeed come, for a remarkable thing was happening. Other women in other cities and other states began to form clubs, too (12, 19).

Without going into the great and lasting uproar it brought upon the society hitherto programmed quite the other way for long, we may just read a little more as to how, instead of ending in a mere fad, the movement finally earned permanence: 'Croly's words signaled an important shift in the purpose of women's clubs. No longer was it enough to read great literature or discuss works of art. She urged club women to lead public reforms' (19).

## 5

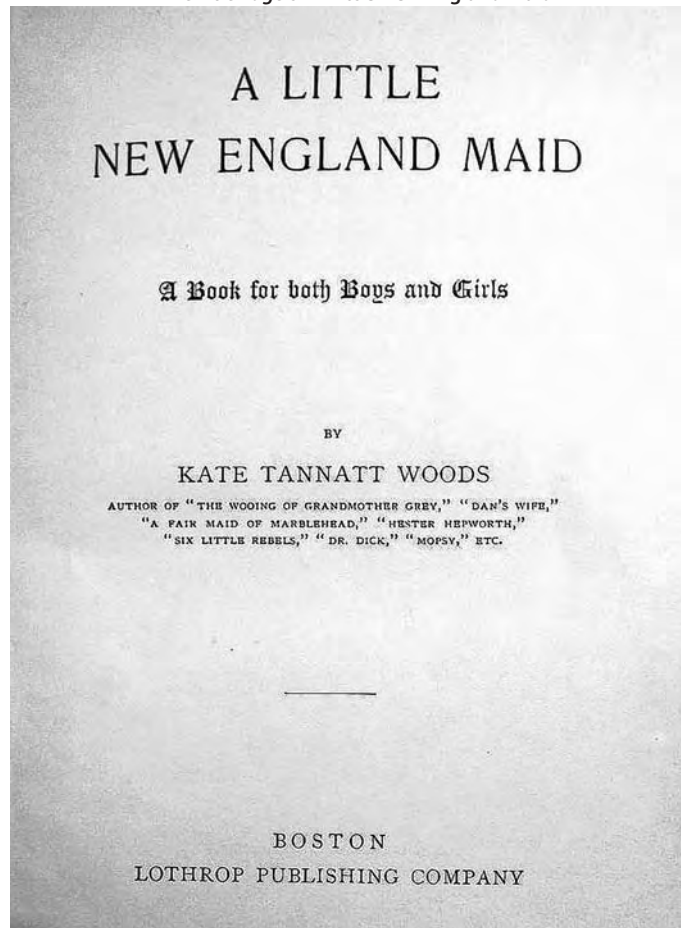
It is really significant that even less than a month from when he reached the US, Swamiji did not only meet, but lived as a guest of a lady whose eminence as a leading organiser of American Women Club movement still lives today. Let us see what *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America* writes about 'The Thought and Work Club of Salem': 'It was on the afternoon of July

2, 1891, that a number of ladies met by invitation at the home of Mrs. Kate Tannatt Woods, an officer in the General Federation of Woman's Club. Seven ladies responded to the invitation: one of them, Mrs. G. A. Oliver, also a member of the Boston Woman's Club. At the second meeting, held July 18th, thirty ladies were present. A constitution was adopted, and Mrs Woods elected president.'<sup>7</sup>

The ambition of the Club is apparent in these few lines: 'In addition to much good literary work, the club has been active in civic affairs. It has labored to improve the schoolrooms, to cleanse the street-cars, and elect women upon the school boards. It has won a half holiday for the clerks in the stores, and presented to the schools a number of fine pictures' (663).

And we are shortly informed of how the Club quickly grew in scope: 'It has grown from the first seven women to three hundred and

*The Title Page of A Little New England Maid*



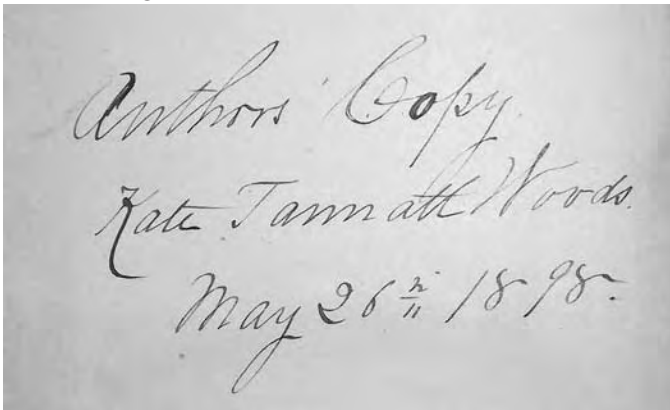


fifty members. The motto is “Lofty thoughts and kindly deeds” ... Its meetings take place on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. Its work is done under committees in art and literature, history, education, and home improvement’ (ibid.). Mrs Woods, obviously because of her commitment and effectiveness, served also as honorary member in clubs far away from her hometown.

The object of the Thought and Work Club, as well as that of Mrs Woods behind linking herself with the club activities at Salem or elsewhere, had all in essence the aim to promote and pursue the ambition which the women club movement had begun in the US—to organise and unite the women to enrich themselves in political, literary, philanthropic, and social purposes to bring overall improvements in areas, both domestic and beyond. Kate had been the founder and one of the first officers of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, the national parent organisation of all the women’s clubs. A few lines as to how this organisation had come into being would give us some idea about Kate’s stature when she met Swamiji.

We know the Sorosis was formed in 1868. While celebrating its twenty-first anniversary in 1889, Jane Croly invited all the women’s clubs throughout the US to attend a convention in

*Kate Woods’s Signature on the First Edition of  
A Little New England Maid in 1898*



New York City. This was followed by formation of the General Federation of Women’s Clubs, or GFWC as is more popular today, on 24 April 1890 with 63 clubs joining it. Today, while continuously reinventing its social relevance to growing changes, the GFWC still has a thriving existence across the US and even beyond. In 2015 it celebrated 125 years of Federation on April 24. Thus we see that merely three years before she invited Swamiji to visit Salem, Mrs Woods had become a founder and one of the first officers of the GFWC when it first came into being.

Kate was also an active member of the Education Association of Boston. This organisation was founded in 1871 as The Woman’s Education Association (WEA) of Boston, Massachusetts, before becoming Woman’s Education Association in 1872. To address the growing problem of lawlessness among young women in Salem, Kate organised a meeting at the Old Town Hall in 1875, which led to the formation of Salem Moral Education Association, later becoming the Woman’s Friend Society that eventually began to operate an employment bureau, reading room, and a residential facility for young women. For long, 36 Lynde Street of Salem had a tearoom; for years together this tearoom, near the corner of Essex Street just north of the McIntire Historic District, had served as an informal headquarters for the Thought and Work Club. Today the building is no more, but its history lingers.

It is extremely remarkable that Kate Woods’s name was selected among the leading American women in all walks of life of the country on whom a publication entitled *A Woman of the Century*<sup>8</sup> came out in 1893 containing fourteen hundred-seventy biographical sketches with portraits; we must remember this was the year when she met Swamiji.





*Present View of Kate Woods's House at 166 North Street, Salem*

## 6

Swamiji became the guest of Kate Woods on 28 August 1893 since around noon or maybe a little later because of the stormy weather that began the day before he left Annisquam in the morning. Kate's house, called Maple Rest, was located at 166, North Street, Salem. This building still stands today and its present profile reads: 166 North St, Salem, MA, Zipcode 01970, having four bedrooms, two baths, covering an area of 3,023 square feet and had been built in 1800. Marie Louise Burke, the eminent researcher, visited this property in 1951; her findings in brief read: 'It was a small two- and-a-half story house with a run-down garden at the side and back. ... It has eleven rooms, three of them in the attic, and originally each had an open fireplace of its own.' However, according to information gathered, the property had last changed hands

in 2003 at \$359,900, while its present estimated price stands at \$493,700. Its property tax in 2018 has been \$6,184. The entrance to the Greenlawn Cemetery is extremely close to this house. And when Mrs Woods died in Buffalo, New York, she was brought and buried here.

Swamiji remained with Kate Woods till 4 September. His first public interactions began when he spoke before the children assembled at the Garden of this house on the afternoon of Tuesday, August 29. Referring to Swamiji's host, Burke writes: 'Some of her books were for children, toward whom she no doubt felt a special interest, for during Swamiji's visit she arranged for him to speak in her garden to a group of local children and young people' (1.43). And to justify the occasion, Burke added: 'This children's afternoon was by no means due to an underestimation of Swamiji's worth. The Woods family,



*Present View of Kate Woods's House at 166 North Street, Salem*

as did all who came into contact with him, revered him' (ibid.).

This programme was announced far before Swamiji arrived at Salem, so were his other engagements too. Four days before he reached Salem, the *Salem Evening News* of 24 August 1893 wrote: 'On Monday next a learned monk from India will speak to the members of the Thought and Work Club, telling something of his land, its religion and customs. Club members will meet the rajah at Wesley chapel on North Street promptly at four o'clock. Gentlemen and ladies who are not members can obtain tickets through some members of the club. The rajah will wear his native costume' (1.46). The same paper on 29 August 1893 reported: 'This afternoon Vive Kanonda will speak on the children of India to any children or young people who may be pleased to listen to him at 166 North Street, Mrs. Woods kindly offering her garden for that purpose' (1.48).

It obviously interests us as to how a man destined to make history within a fortnight in Chicago did interact with some unknown children at Salem. On 1 September, the *Salem Evening News* gave us the answer: 'His simple talk to the children on Tuesday last concerning the games, schools, customs and manners of children in India was valuable and most interesting. His kind heart was touched by the statement of a little miss that her teacher had "licked her so hard that she almost broke her finger". "We have no corporal punishment in our schools", he said, "none at all"' (1.51).

These apart, what went on during Swamiji's week-long stay at Salem, or how he and his views were weighed up have its distinct importance. And no less important is how Swamiji himself, unknown to everyone, responded to people who, mostly were either ignorant or misinformed about his country or vocation. In this context we shall first go through the newspaper reports.

Among the notables who attended Swamiji's lectures at Salem, was the most distinguished Caroline Maria Seymour Severance. According to *Encyclopaedia Britannica*,

In 1868 she helped found the New England Women's Club, which preceded New York's Sorosis by a month as a pioneer organization for women. She served as the group's president until 1871 (when she was succeeded by Julia Ward Howe). Through the club she helped establish the Girls' Latin School of Boston and worked to secure the election of women to the city school board. In 1869 Severance joined Lucy Stone in organizing the American Woman Suffrage Association.<sup>10</sup>

This lady is known since long as the 'Mother of Women's Clubs'. And it needs mention that when during 1899–1900 Swamiji was lecturing in Western America for over six months, this remarkable lady arranged a reception for him at her house. The *Los Angeles Herald* of 24 December 1899 writes: 'An informal reception was given the Swami Vivekananda yesterday morning by Mrs. C. M. Severance at her home on West Adams Street. The Swami answered many questions asked by the guests concerning the condition of women in India and the educational needs of his people.'<sup>11</sup> Incidentally, Mrs Woods was also present at this reception.

Besides Mrs Severance, there was another leading club woman present at the lecture before the Thought and Work Club, Mrs Francis W Breed of the North Shore Club of Lynn, Massachusetts.

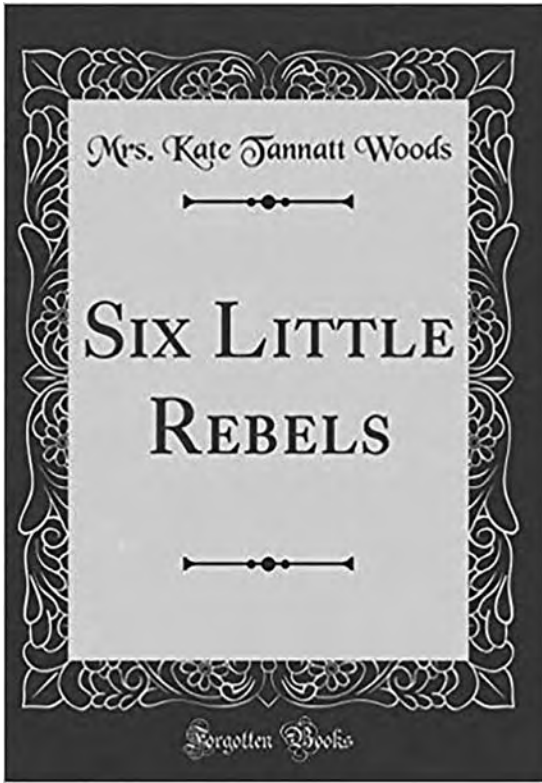
Let us now see a report in the *Salem Evening News* of 29 August 1893, wherein we learn that despite the 'warm weather of yesterday afternoon, a goodly number of members of the Thought and Work Club, with guests gathered in Wesley chapel to meet' Swamiji and listened to his 'informal address' on 'the religion of the Hindoos' and their 'caste' system, which was 'simply a social division' without any dependence on 'their religion' (1.46).

In many of his utterances since Swamiji reached the US, as well as in the reminiscences of people who met him before the Parliament began, we find one point on which everyone concurs—Swamiji had been to the West primarily to find ways to uplift the poverty-stricken people of his motherland. His sincere words to the people of Salem are more than a proof as to how he tried to convince them for this purpose. The paper narrates:

The poverty of the majority of the masses was strongly dwelt upon. ... In some instances the people in whole districts of the country subsist for months and even years, wholly upon flowers, produced by a certain tree which when boiled are edible. In other districts the men eat rice only, the women and children must satisfy their hunger with the water in which the rice is cooked. A failure of the rice crop means famine. Half the people live upon one meal a day the other half know not whence the next meal will come (1.46–7).

Swamiji's talks on such innumerable distressed people raised questions from the attending clergies about whether the missionaries in India did nothing in this regard. Swamiji's views are relayed in the report: 'The missionaries had fine theories there and started in with good ideas, but had done nothing for the industrial condition of the people. He said Americans, instead of sending out missionaries to train them in religion, would better send some one out to give them industrial education' (1.47). Questions were also hurled at him on the condition of women in India, the custom of their accompanying dead husbands to the pyres, the practice of throwing children before the Chariot of Jagannatha, and the custom of idolatry. Swamiji gave appropriate answers to all such queries. At the end of its report the paper came up with a description of Swamiji: 'In person he is a fine looking man, dark but comely, dressed in a long robe





The Cover of a Recent Reprint of *Six Little Rebels*

of a yellowish red color confined at the waist with a cord, and wearing on his head a yellow turban. Being a monk he has no caste, and may eat and drink with anyone' (1.48).

More or less the same reporting came up in the *Daily Gazette* of 29 August 1893 (1.48–9). About Swamiji they wrote: 'He wore an orange colored gown, with red sash, yellow turban, with the end hanging down on one side, which he used for a handkerchief, and congress shoes' (1.49). Notably, the *Daily Gazette* was the first in line to hear why Swamiji travelled to West: 'The speaker explained his mission in his country to be to organize monks for industrial purposes, that they might give the people the benefit of this industrial education and thus to elevate them and improve their condition' (ibid.).

The day before he left Salem, Swamiji gave

another lecture at a local church; on 1 September 1893 the *Salem Evening News* writes: 'The learned Monk from India, who is spending a few days in this city, will speak in the East Church Sunday evening at 7-30' (1.51). The reporting came out in the *Daily Gazette* of 5 September 1893, and we shall present it in two sections; first, what Swamiji said: 'Rajah Swani Vivi Rananda of India spoke at the East church Sunday evening, on the religion of India and the poor of his native land. A good audience assembled, but it was not so large as the importance of the subject or the interesting speaker deserved. ... The great need of India today, which is not the India of fifty years ago, is, he said, missionaries to educate the people industrially and socially and not religiously. The Hindoos have all the religion they want, and the Hindoo religion is the most ancient in the world' (1.51–2). Secondly, about how the paper saw him: 'The monk was dressed in his native costume, and spoke about forty minutes. ... The monk is a very pleasant speaker and held the close attention of his audience' (1.51–2).

Whether Swamiji knew it or not beforehand, during his lectures at Salem he first had to face narrow and outspoken clergies. But to us today it is more important how he faced them, about this we shall talk later.

## 7

Perhaps Swamiji left Salem on the day he did for an invitation which he surely had been expecting before. For we see him writing this from Salem on 30 August to Prof. John Henry Wright:<sup>12</sup> 'I am going off from here today. ... I have received an invitation with full directions from Mr. Sanborn. So I am going to Saratoga on Monday.'<sup>13</sup> In this same letter we learn that till then Swamiji was uncertain of his appearance at the Parliament. He asks Prof. Wright: 'I hope you have received some reply from Chicago' (ibid.). No



doubt he was referring to the outcome of the Professor's historic introductory letter to the organisers of the Parliament. But the answer came before he left Salem. In his letter to Prof. Wright on 2 September we read: "I hasten to tender my heartfelt gratitude to you for your letters of introduction. I have received a letter from Mr. Thelers of Chicago giving me the names of some of the delegates and other things about the Congress" (ibid.).

The story about what followed when he left Salem is discussed elsewhere. We shall now come up with something more about Swamiji at Salem, which will have incidents and expressions perhaps no less attractive.

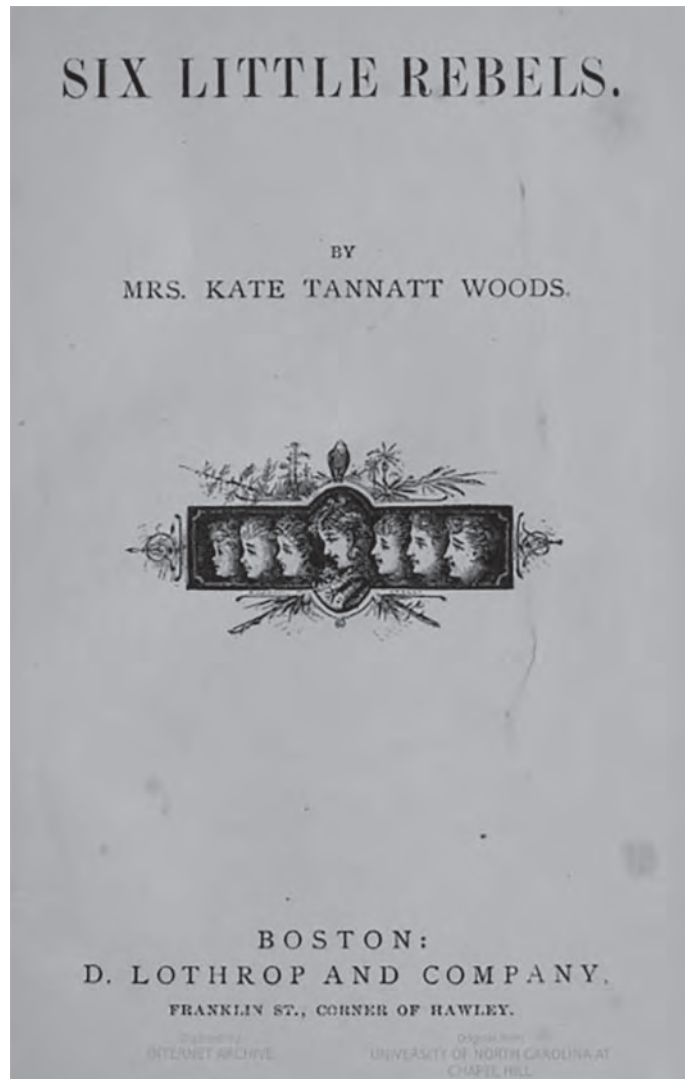
## 8

As was said at the outset, nothing was known before the spring of 1950 about Swamiji's stay at Salem till contact could be made with Mrs Helen Tyson Woods, the wife of Prince Tannatt Woods. Major information as regards Swamiji's stay there and what he did during the seven days he had been with the Woods came through the correspondence exchanged between Helen Woods and Josephine M Stanbury of the Vedanta Society of Northern California.<sup>14</sup> Four letters of Mrs Helen Woods in 1950, dated April 18, May 17 and 25, and August 31, revealed the interesting story we know today. We present a brief narrative from those disclosures.

We have seen before that Prince Woods married Helen Tyson in September 1895, just two years after Swamiji had been to the Woods house. Fortunately, Helen had two advantages. First, as a member of the Woods family she had access to all the admiring recollections of both her husband and her mother-in-law when on occasions they relived their happy memories of Swamiji. Secondly, when her engagement with Prince became final, she visited their house on the very

day when Swamiji visited them for the second time. She recollects: 'He came with some friends in a carriage and a fine pair of horses just after I met my husband-to-be and was invited there. I just saw him as he said "Goodbye"' (1.42). And it was from her that we learn that Swamiji 'gave his staff, his most precious possession' to Prince Woods, and his trunk and blanket to Mrs Kate Woods. And she remembered that while giving them to Mrs Woods Swamiji said: 'Only my most precious possessions should I give to my friends who have made me at home in this great country' (ibid.). This gesture did really impress Helen Woods so greatly that in her letter she

*The Title Page of Six Little Rebels in 1879*



wrote: 'This was a most gracious gesture after he had been feted all over the country' (ibid.).

But for long the Woods kept this great legacy, the things Swamiji left to them, close to their heart and never budged even a little, when in 1900 the British Museum offered \$200 for the trunk. This was how till 1950 these things could safely remain with them when it finally came into the possession of the Vedanta Society of Northern California (VSNC). And we must remember that when recapitulating the old history in her letters, Helen Woods was in her mid-seventies. But her almost unbroken memories enriched the history of Swamiji as to how the young monk even while quite new in the West and in all probability unaware of his later prophetic role, could remain unperturbed while dealing with unfriendly audiences.

During the first lecture at the Wesley church on 29 August 1893, as the *Salem Evening News* writes, 'He was frequently and closely questioned by Dr. F. A. Gardner and Rev. S. F. Nobbs of the Central Baptist Church' (1.47). Through Helen Woods we learn that 'All the ministers were present and none of them appreciated what he said. Several were most critical' (1.50). This was what she later heard from her mother-in-law; her version reads: 'I ... remember that my mother-in-law ... many times spoke of the outspoken, narrow attitude of most of the ministers in Salem who openly criticised him in the Pulpit. She had arranged an open meeting in one of the churches and most of the ministers openly accosted him in the most acrimonious manner while he remained gentle in speech and manner' (1.50). Swamiji never needed to change this attitude no matter how severe the attacks and acrimonies were in the West; many latter-day newspaper reports stand witness to this effect. Before we conclude, an excerpt from the *Iowa State Register* of 3 December 1893 would display the essence

of this attitude: 'The workings of his mind, so subtle and so brilliant, so well stored and so well trained, sometimes dazzled his hearers, but it was always a most interesting study. He said nothing unkind, for his nature would not permit that. Those who came to know him best found him the most gentle and lovable of men, so honest, frank and unpretending, always grateful for the many kindnesses that were shown him' (1.211).

### Epilogue

During his New England days before the Parliament, Swamiji came across some remarkable personalities who, besides their individual brilliance, were among the leading representatives of a growing nation. This had enabled him to come closer to the country, her people, and the social milieu he would growingly interact with during the next few years. His close acquaintance with Kate Tannatt Woods allowed him to understand and appreciate contemporary American women in their truest worth. It was by no means an exaggeration what Henry Steele Commager (1902–98), the noted American historian and educator, wrote about American women in his book *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character Since the 1880's*: 'Nowhere were they more honored and protected, nowhere given wider scope for the employment of their talents and virtues' (1.100). And: 'In all matters of church and school, women took the lead. ... Women not only controlled education and religion but largely dictated the standards of literature and art and clothed culture so ostentatiously in feminine garb that the term itself came to have connotations of effeminacy' (1.100–1). But this was written much later when Yale University first published this book in 1950. Therefore, it would be much more interesting to know what Swamiji felt when he saw those women shaping their nation with an almost unshakeable earnestness. His

letter to Swami Ramakrishnananda from Chicago on 19 March 1894 reads in part: 'Nowhere in the world are women like those of this country. How pure, independent, self-relying, and kind-hearted! It is the women who are the life and soul of this country. All learning and culture are centred in them.'<sup>15</sup>

May be this was the time when Swamiji, the reformer and the originator of world's first exclusive women's monastery, first began to formulate his noble plans for his motherland. But this letter has much more that interested readers may like to see as regards how Swamiji, while eulogising American women for many of their virtues, had contrasted the plight of their Indian counterparts for the long prevailing social injustice and taboos inflicted upon them. For he knew where the Indian women excelled over their Western counterparts—it was the former's spirituality. Thus despite his unstinted appreciation, or more so taking vital cues from what the brave American women were doing for their country, Swamiji was unhesitant in pointing out where the difference lay: 'We are thankful for your criticism of our women. But while you are speaking of them I will

say that I should be glad to see a dozen spiritual women in America. ... intellectuality is not all that there is for a man or woman. There should be also spirituality, but that side is entirely absent from christian countries. They live in India.'<sup>16</sup>


He knew the true worth of Indian women perhaps much more than anyone else of his time or later. When he came back to India after his first visit to the West, Swamiji remained in India a little over two years before journeying there again in 1899. During his stay in India, he moved around the country and reassessed everything from a different standpoint that his experience in the West had entitled him to. Once during his sea voyage to England in 1899 he was telling Sister Nivedita about the foremost tasks before India. Much later, when Swamiji was no more, Nivedita permitted us a few glimpses into what he tried to communicate in his said talks:

Swamiji felt that there was no task before India which could compare in importance with that of Woman's education. His own life had had two definite personal purposes, of which one had been the establishment of a home for the Order of Ramakrishna, while the other was the

*The Greenlawn Cemetery Close to Kate Woods's House*



initiation of some endeavour towards the education of woman. With five hundred men, he would say, the conquest of India might take fifty years: with as many women, not more than a few weeks.<sup>17</sup>

No doubt these words still thrill many of us beyond measure, but perhaps it is much more important how we really understand the inherent message in them and try to translate them into action. 

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12. May be Swamiji began this letter much before than when he actually completed it. For his words 'going off from here today' differs with the date on which he actually left Salem; though what he later wrote, 'going to Saratoga on Monday', matches exactly with the date.
13. *Complete Works*, 7.449.
14. See *New Discoveries*, 1.42, 50, 494. See references 32–6, 40–1 at *New Discoveries*, 1.494.
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16. *New Discoveries*, 1.416.
17. Sister Nivedita, *The Master as I Saw Him* (Calcutta: Udbodhan, 1994), 260.

TO  
**My Beloved Brother,**  
**GENERAL T. R. TANNATT,**  
 THIS SIMPLE STORY IS DEDICATED  
 WITH  
 MANY TENDER MEMORIES  
 OF  
 CHILDHOOD'S DAYS.

K. T. W.

SALEM, MASS., MARCH, 1886.

*Kate Tannatt Woods Dedicating a Book to Her Brother in 1886*



# ***Vedantic Socialism*** ***—Cosmopolitan Reflections of*** ***Swami Vivekananda***

**Ambili S**

**W**E ANALYSE the comments of Swami Satprakashananda on Swami Vivekananda. He says:

A special characteristic of the present age is the general tendency of the human mind to conceive mankind as a whole. Man's mental vision is no longer confined to his family situation, civic conditions, social status, racial characteristics, or nationality. It is focused on the world at large, nay, it extends beyond this globe to the solar universe, even reaches the stellar. Some go so far as to dream of colonizing one of the adjacent planets in order to solve the menacing problem of population explosion on the earth.<sup>1</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda notes:

A distinctive characteristic of Swami Vivekananda is the comprehensiveness of his vision. He is remarkably universal. His thought is universal, his love universal, his message universal, and his life-work universal. He stands up for mankind in general, without distinction of race or nationality, creed or culture, sex or age. He sees the divine self of man and looks upon the human form as the very symbol of the Divinity. In Vivekananda the universal spirit has found a loving, dynamic and all-encompassing expression, which is rarely to be found elsewhere. In his scheme of life there is no inherent conflict between faith and reason, between science and religion, between poetry and philosophy, between action and meditation, between social

and monastic ideals. His goal was to lead each and every individual at whatever level or in whatever sphere of life to the highest goal, to the realization of his innate perfection.<sup>2</sup>

Swamiji said: 'Take man where he stands, and from there give him a lift.'<sup>3</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda further elaborates:

With the development of spiritual consciousness ... an individual's moral and rational nature are bound to develop ... that make his cultural growth, his social relations, his material well-being sound and secure. The exemplary lives lived by spiritual personages serve as guides for the men of the world. Their wisdom, their moral integrity, their lofty thoughts, and noble deeds even influence the masses. That is why in the wake of religious revival in a country there has been social, political, cultural, and material advancement as well, creating epochs in the history of human civilization. ...

Swami Vivekananda's universality is rooted in his experience of the spiritual oneness of existence. It is not due simply to his intellectual comprehension, extensive knowledge, keen interest in human values, and world-wide sympathy or fellow-feeling. It is different in character from humanism, humanitarianism, and universalism. All of these value man as man, irrespective of creed, colour, rank, or position. Their highest conception of man is from the empirical viewpoint. But Swami Vivekananda sees God dwelling in human forms. To his spiritual



vision man's real Self is ever pure, free, immortal, and divine. The same Supreme Being, Pure Consciousness, dwells within each psychophysical organism as the conscious self more or less manifest. In human individuals He shines distinctly as the knowing self. The One Infinite Self is apparently divided into countless individual selves; even as the moon appears as myriad moons being reflected in innumerable ripples of water. Of all the living creatures man alone is capable of realizing his essential identity with the Divinity and his unity with all living creatures. He who attains this experience feels spiritual relationship with one and all, the only relationship between man and his fellow-creatures that transcends all distinctions of the psycho-physical adjuncts and develops universal love.<sup>4</sup>

Sri Krishna says in the Bhagavadgita: 'With imperfections exhausted, doubts dispelled, senses controlled, engaged in the good of all beings, the knowers of truth attain complete freedom and blessedness.'<sup>5</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda continues:

Swami Vivekananda's all-embracing love was the spontaneous expression of spiritual enlightenment in the highest sense. ... Swami Vivekananda is the standard-bearer of Ramakrishna. Their divine mission is the reconstruction of humanity in the present age on the spiritual foundation, which means the recognition of four fundamental truths. Explicit or implicit, these basic principles underlie all religions. Not only do they sustain the religious life of man, but also uphold other human ideals. We may enunciate them as follows:

(1) The ever-changing world of phenomena, marked by interdependence and consisting of pairs of opposites, is held by one eternal ideal Reality, usually called God, who is self-existent and self-manifest, and answers to man's conception of perfection in every way.

(2) Every individual psychophysical system of ceaseless change is sustained by a central principle, which is constant, self-luminous ever pure and free.

(3) The central principle of the microcosm is not different from the central principle of the macrocosm, that is to say, there is kinship or unity between the soul of man and the soul of the universe. The truth is, what is innermost in the one is the innermost in the other.

(4) To realize this kinship or unity is the goal of life; all human concerns should be regulated with this end in view. ...

Today the world is in dire need of a universal message and a comprehensive view of life, both of which Swami Vivekananda has provided. Swami Vivekananda perceived spiritual unity as the ultimate ground of all diversity. It is the one goal of all human knowledge. It underlies all religious doctrines and experiences, all metaphysical conceptions, all ethical ideals, and scientific truths. It unites all forms of existence, penetrates all phases of life. Indeed, this imperfect world has perfection as its very basis and being the same ideal existence has varied manifestations through divergent forms. The forms

differ, but the substance is one and the same. He who finds this One Self of all abhors none.<sup>6</sup>

Swamiji says:

If you go below the surface, you find that Unity between man and man, between races and races, high and low, rich and poor, gods and men, and men and animals. If you go deep enough, all will be seen as only variations of the One and he who has attained to this conception of Oneness has no more delusion. What can delude him? He knows the reality of everything, the secret of everything. Where there is any more misery for him? What does he desire? He has traced the reality of everything to the Lord, the Centre, the Unity of everything, and that is Eternal Existence, Eternal knowledge, Eternal bliss.<sup>7</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda writes further: 'Swami Vivekananda's penetrating insight finds no fundamental difference between one section of humanity and another; the Eastern and the Western form one human race struggling for the fulfilment of its highest destiny.'<sup>8</sup> Swamiji says: 'We have developed one phase of humanity, and they another. It is the union of two that is wanted. The word freedom which is the watch-word of our religion means freedom physically, mentally, and spiritually.'<sup>9</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda writes:

The special contribution of the Orient to world-culture is religion; the special contribution of the Occident to world-culture is science. In Swami Vivekananda's view the present age needs the union of the two; this will bring about a unique civilization. He has explained that there is no contradiction between science and religion, and that modern science has strengthened the position of religion rather than weakening it.

Without the recognition of the spiritual oneness of mankind the unification of the world cannot be accomplished. It is the only common ground where heterogeneous human elements can meet despite racial, social, economic,

political, and cultural differences. The various races and nations of the world cannot be any time at the same level economically, politically, socially, or culturally. Nor can their interest in all these fields ever be identical. Naturally, the developed nations will find themselves close together and away from the underdeveloped. Races of similar cultural standards and tastes will come near to one another separated from the rest. The world-government, inter-cultural relations and world-organizations such as the United Nations will help considerably to unite the various sections of humanity, but at the same time will have a tendency to divide mankind into different blocks and groups with party interests.

Apart from the perception of the spiritual solidarity of the universe his prophetic vision of a shrunken, compact world brought about today by marvellous facilities of transportation and communication was a contributive factor to his concept of mankind as a unity well integrated in all aspects of life. Humanity must move as one body in an orderly procession, in which every individual, every nation, will have a distinctive role to play. Unity in variety and not uniformity is the pattern for world-culture. There is no inherent conflict between one aspect of life and another. Physical, intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and spiritual development must continue hand in hand. Science and religion, arts and ethics, philosophy and mysticism will all have their respective places in human life. One expression of life does not contradict another as long as they contribute to the highest Good that man has to achieve. The goal of civilization cannot be different from the goal of religion. ...

The message of Swami Vivekananda is, indeed, the gospel of universal truth. The religion and philosophy of Vedanta ... which he expounded, contains the essentials of all the religions of the world. Vedanta is not, truly speaking, one of the many faiths or religious systems, but the common basis of all of them; inasmuch as it dwells on the fundamental truths that underlie the different religious doctrines and

practices. It is in a sense a system of religions. It teaches not one particular aspect or concept of God, but several; it prescribes not one particular spiritual discipline or method of worship, but several. ... The Goal is one and the same, but the ways differ according to the aspirants' aptitudes and conditions of life. ...

The universality of religion does not point to the existence of one religion the world over as the sole survivor of the rest, as the bigots imagine. It simply means the peaceful co-existence of all religions. It is to be achieved by mutual understanding, appreciation and a reverent attitude towards one another. Not even eclecticism nor syncretism can establish the harmony of religions that Swami Vivekananda envisions. Eclecticism aims to select the best out of every religion and combine them into a consistent whole. It may present something as attractive as a bouquet of flowers. ... Syncretism aims to reconcile the divergent religions by stressing the similarities among them and ignoring their differences. But in Swami Vivekananda's view the differences have deep meanings. They meet the requirements of the seekers of different capabilities and temperaments. With all their differences, religions should live together harmoniously. The only universal religion possible in the world is the amity of religions.<sup>10</sup>

Swamiji says:

The Bible, the Vedas, the Koran, and all other sacred books are but so many pages, and an infinite number of pages remain yet to be unfolded. I would leave it open for all of them. We stand in the present, but open ourselves to the infinite future. We take in all that has been in the past, enjoy the light of the present, and open every window of the heart for all that will come in the future. Salutations to all Prophets of the past, to all the great ones of the present and to all that is to come in the future!<sup>11</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda says:

Harmony of religions is the crying need of the day. It is essential to the peace and progress of

the world. No civilization can exist nor grow without this. All bigotry and intolerance, all narrowness and sectarianism must leave human minds. Instead there should be mutual regard, friendliness, and co-operation in all spheres of life. Religion, which avowedly stands for love, charity, and peace, must take the lead. Time has come when religious ideas must broaden. The adherents of every religion must know the universal truths that underlie all religious doctrines and disciplines despite their differences. Without understanding them no follower of any religion can understand his own religion, or the religions of others. The lack of appreciation means the lack of sympathy and benevolence. The same spiritual principles that support religion support all other aspects of life. Spirituality is the key to life's development in all fields. Religious ideals in a broad sense must cover the entire life of man. ... The central truth of religion is the divinity of man. ... To realize this divinity is the goal of spiritual life.<sup>12</sup>

Swamiji defines religion: 'Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man.'<sup>13</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda says:

The knowledge of this divinity is the secret of man's development both in individual and collective life, secular as well as spiritual. It finds expression in two distinct ways: 'I am divine' and 'Thou art divine'. As a man becomes aware of his own divinity he becomes aware at the same time of the divinity of his fellow-beings. Along with the development of his faith in himself his regard for others develops. His potentialities grow as his self-faith is intensified. His capacity for serving his fellow creatures necessarily increases. ... Only the realization of spiritual oneness with all can develop such universal love. It is bliss and freedom at the same time.<sup>14</sup>

Swamiji said: 'The infinite oneness of the Soul is the eternal sanction of all morality, that you and I are not only brothers—every literature voicing man's struggle towards freedom has preached that for you—but that you and I are really one. This



is the dictate of Indian Philosophy. This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality.’<sup>15</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda says:

Swami Vivekananda has also introduced a universal form of worship. God dwells in man as the inmost Self, He can be directly worshipped by serving man. All social work and the teaching of religion as well should be carried on in the spirit of worshipping God in man. ... He stresses the importance of man above all. Man’s inner nature is much more important than his outer resources. It is man that makes money; money does not make man. It is man that makes laws; laws do not make man. The solution of world problems rests basically on the individual’s moral and spiritual lives. If these be lacking nothing can save the human situation; no political or economic system, no social order, no world-organization, no advancement of scientific knowledge and technology, no development of arts, no rapidity of transportation and communication, no high standard of living, no defence measures, no subtle ideologies, no metaphysical concepts can establish peace and security in the world. Even education without a sound outlook on life cannot help us in this respect.<sup>16</sup>

Swamiji says:

It is a man-making religion that we want. It is man-making theories that we want. It is man-making education all round that we want. And here is the test of truth—anything that makes you weak physically, intellectually, and spiritually, reject as poison; there is no life in it, it cannot be true. Truth is strengthening. Truth is purity, truth is all-knowledge; truth must be strengthening, must be enlightening, must be invigorating.<sup>17</sup>

Swami Satprakashananda concludes:

The life and message of Swami Vivekananda point to the fact that there can be unity among men on the widest scale despite all differences. The world-unity which is the crying need of the age has to be achieved not by exclusion or uniformity but by union, by following the

principle of unity in variety. The one and the same ideal—Ideal Reality—Pure Being-Consciousness-Bliss—holds all multiplicity; the same Divine Being who controls the universe dwells in the hearts of all individuals as the inmost self. This central truth is the key to the explanation of all facts. To realize the Divinity is the supreme end of human life. From any situation in life a person can proceed towards this Goal following his own line of development according to his or her psychophysical constitution. One expression of life does not contradict another as long as it is in conformity with the highest ideal. All other ideals of life should be subordinate to this supreme one. All human values—all that are necessary and desirable—art, literature, science, philosophy, ethics, politics, economics can contribute to the attainment of the highest Good, the Divine perfection.<sup>18</sup>



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# BALABODHA

*Ancient Wisdom Made Easy*

## Shanti

THE WORD 'SHANTI' is a commonly used Sanskrit word. It is used by people, who do not even know Sanskrit, as it is present in almost every Indian language. The widely used meaning of the word 'shanti' is peace, but it is necessary to see the other meanings and the origins of this word. This is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is a classical language like Greek, Latin, and Persian. And in Sanskrit, as in most classical languages, most words are derived from a stem or root.

The word 'shanti' is derived from the root word *shama*, which means tranquillity, calmness, rest, equanimity, quietude, quietism, absence of passion, abstraction from external objects through intense meditation, peace, peace with, tranquilisation, pacification, allayment, alleviation, cessation, extinction, absence of passion or excitement, impotence, alleviation or cure of disease, convalescence, final happiness, emancipation from all the illusions of existence, indifference, apathy, the hand, imprecation, malediction, of a king of the Nandivegas, of a son of Andhaka, of a son of *Dharma Sutra*, and of a divine female. When the suffix *ktin* is added to *shama*, the word 'shanti' is derived. 'Shanti' means tranquillity, peace, quiet, calmness of mind, absence of passion, averting of pain, indifference to objects of pleasure or pain, alleviation of evil or pain, cessation, abatement, extinction, a pause, breach, interruption, any expiatory or propitiatory rite for averting evil or calamity, welfare, prosperity, good fortune, ease, comfort, happiness, bliss, destruction, end, eternal rest, death, tranquillity personified, daughter of Shraddha, wife of Atharvan,

daughter of Daksha, wife of Dharma, of a son of Indra, Indra in the tenth *manvantara* or the tenth era of Manu, of a son of Vishnu and Dakshina, of a son of Krishna and Kalindi, of a rishi, of a son of Angirasa, of a disciple of Bhuti, of a son of Nila, of the father of Sushanti, of an Arhat of the Jains, of a Chakravarti of the Jains, of a teacher in Buddhism, a quality or state of mind, knowledge, stoicism, tranquillity of devotion, complete fixing of the mind on the subject of meditation or worship, auspiciousness, felicity, rest, repose, preliminary ceremonies to avert inauspicious accidents at any religious celebration, remission, cessation of hostility, stop, consolation, solace, settlement of differences, reconciliation, appeasement of hunger, exculpation or absolution from blame, Goddess Durga, preservation, daughter of Kardama, a god, author and master of the Atharva Samhita, a son of Tamasa, the Indra of the gods Sudhaman and Viruddhas, a part of Hari, a divine goddess, one of the four fruits of pranayama, the ruin of sins of the departed ancestors and cognates, Vedic mantras, auspicious or good time according to astrology, satisfaction upon enjoying sense-objects, and one of the *gopis* accompanying Radha.

'Shanti' also denotes a Vedic prayer for the removal of sufferings caused by one's body and mind, the other living beings, and natural forces. These prayers are chanted to ensure the proper completion of the study, teaching, writing, or other task at hand. Though the ultimate goal of all spiritual traditions is attaining shanti, some amount of shanti in terms of the contentment of mind is necessary to start any spiritual practice.



# TRADITIONAL TALES

## *The Holy Name of God*

**T**HIS STORY is being handed down since the time of the disciples of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu. Long ago, there lived in a village, a poor brahmana and his wife. He was devoted to God and led a disciplined life. Though he was poor, he did not desire wealth. He was content with what he had. He led a simple life with his meagre income. He helped the poor, the underprivileged, and the distressed, according to his mite. He served sadhus. Thus, he had expenses according to his income.

However, the brahmana's wife was quite opposite to him in her disposition. She was miles away from the idea of contentment. She dreamt of amassing more and more wealth and revelling in the comforts of the world. Since she did not have money enough to live the lavish life of her dreams, she constantly bickered about the need

for her husband to earn more money. The brahmana tried to convince her otherwise: 'The Lord has given us enough wealth for our food and clothing. Don't desire for more.' However, his wife did not heed to his words and kept on repeating her obsessive demands for more wealth. Her nagging turned to be a hellish misery for the brahmana.

Once a monk came to the village of the brahmana. Large numbers of people went to have his darshan. Word spread in the village that the monk could perform miracles. The brahmana's wife pestered him: 'People are talking greatly about the monk who has come to our village. It seems he has many powers of yoga. You go to him and ask him to do something to remove our adversity.' The brahmana pleaded in hesitation: 'How can I ask a monk to find ways for getting

some wealth for us? It is only appropriate and just to ask of a monk, blessings so that I might develop the qualities of discernment, dispassion, bhakti, and jnana. To talk with him about worldly affairs and to ask of him to fulfil worldly desires is completely inappropriate.'

However, the brahmana's wife was not ready to hear any advice. Mad with the desire for wealth, she chided the brahmana: 'You go to the monk and tell him exactly what I have told you.' Finding no other way to calm his adamant wife, the brahmana gave up his self-respect and unwillingly proceeded towards the abode of the monk. The brahmana reached the presence of the monk and sat before him silently. He felt ashamed to convey his wife's words to the monk. He sat there for a while with hesitation. At last, the monk himself talked to the brahmana: 'Dear child! You are jostling with something in your mind. Feel free to ask any questions that you might have.'

The brahmana shamefacedly told the monk: 'Sir, my wife tells me that you are endowed with yogic powers and that you can perform miracles. We are poor. My wife believes that if we could get the philosopher's stone, we could end our poverty and roll in wealth. Please arrange for us to get such a philosopher's stone. I have come to you to get a philosopher's stone because of my wife's insistence.' Hearing this, the monk replied quite casually: 'Oh! Is that all? Only yesterday did I throw such a philosopher's stone in the gutter at the end of this village. If you want, you can search for the stone in that gutter.' The brahmana hurried to the gutter that the monk had mentioned. After frantically searching the gutter here and there for some time, he got a triangular radiating stone. He guessed that that was the stone that the monk had indicated. He touched a stone lying nearby with this radiating stone, and lo, it immediately turned into gold.

The brahmana went with the philosopher's stone and sat in front of the monk, and said: 'Sir, you have thrown into the gutter, considering worthless the invaluable philosopher's stone that turns whatever it touches into gold. Since you have thrown it considering it useless, I think that definitely you have got something that is more valuable than the philosopher's stone. May I know what is that you possess, which is more valuable than the philosopher's stone? Can you give it to me?' The monk said: 'Dear child! What you think is right. I have something that is million times valuable than this philosopher's stone; it is the most precious holy name of God. However, your wife has not yet attained the maturity needed to receive the holy name of God. She is the abode of worldly desires. Go to her and give her this philosopher's stone and then you may come to me. I will happily give you the holy name of God that is greater than this philosopher's stone in all respects.'

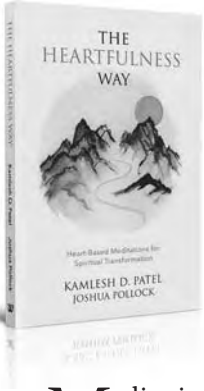
The brahmana decided to receive from the monk, the incomparable holy name of God that was greater than the philosopher's stone, which would give all wealth, much craved for by worldly people. According to the monk's advice, the brahmana gave the philosopher's stone to his wife and returned. He had renounced his hearth and home and wife. The monk explained to him how great the holy name of God was in comparison to worldly wealth and pleasures. Then, he gave the holy name of God to the brahmana. The brahmana constantly repeated the holy name of God that he had received from the monk. Consequently, he received the darshan of the Lord. In the end, he became free from the transmigratory existence of repeated births and deaths, which cause fear, misery, and bondage. Just like a river merges with the ocean, he attained mukti that makes one merge with God.





# REVIEWS

For review in PRABUDDHA BHARATA,  
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## ***The Heartfulness Way: Heart-Based Meditations for Spiritual Transformation***

Kamlesh D Patel and  
Joshua Pollock

Westland Publications Private Limited, 61, Second Floor, Silverline Building, Alapakkam Main Road, Maduravoyal, Chennai 600095. 2018. ₹299. xvi + 196 pp. PB. ISBN 9789386850560.

Meditation means to think, contemplate, ponder, or devise. Generally, the word ‘meditation’ is used in the sense of contemplation. The goal of meditation can be anything from the material to the spiritual. One could meditate on an object, person, form, sequence of events, or idea. One may meditate to have a better physical and mental health. One might meditate to get rid of the bondage that is the body and the mind, and get liberated from the transmigratory cycle of repeated births and deaths. This liberation is called mukti.

Meditation has been there probably since the advent of humanity on this earth. And one cannot say with certainty that the other living beings do not meditate! Of course, they cannot communicate their ideas about different kinds of meditations in a language comprehensible by us humans. The hustle-bustle of the modern life of aspirations and achievements has brought psychological well-being and emotional satisfaction to a grave peril. Nothing contents us anymore. More and finer degrees of any kind of enjoyment is available to all just for demand.

It is in this background of one of the most volatile ages of human civilisation, at least as far as rootedness in one’s mental poise is concerned, that meditation has acquired a never-before felt importance. Though often it is touted as a magic pill to cure all malaise, meditation of any kind requires some kind of discipline of the body and

the mind. The availability of varied meditative practices, both religious and otherwise, befuddle the unlearned about which kind of practice to choose. Tomes on meditation available to buy or read online, do not help either.

This book is one of the few in a great corpus of literature on meditation, that makes understanding meditation effortless. Not posing as a one-cure-for-all instant solution, this book attunes and trains a person’s mind, and makes one ready to get immersed in meditation, which according to Kamlesh D Patel and Joshua Pollock can be done only through practice.

Pollock assures us that ‘no book can ever transform us. A book may give us wisdom, but it cannot make us wise. A book can give us knowledge, but it cannot make us experience the truth of that knowledge. What this book offers is an experiential method that has helped many individuals discover that truth for themselves’ (xv).

This book is written as a dialogue between Pollock and Patel, who is endearingly called Daaji by his followers. He is the fourth guide in the lineage of gurus of the Heartfulness Way or Sahaj Marg method of meditation of the Sri Ram Chandra Mission. Written in a lucid style, this book gives a good grounding on the necessity and importance of meditation in our lives. Pollock emphasises the need for practice in meditation: ‘In any experiment, there is an experimenter, there is a subject to be experimented upon, and there is a result. In the spiritual experiment, all three roles belong to you. You are the experimenter, you are the subject of the experiment, and you are its result. With such an experiment, there is never any finality, but only an ongoing process of discovery. That is the joy and wonder of Heartfulness’ (xvi).

Daaji says: ‘Initially, people tend to approach meditative practice with a wide spectrum of aims. For example, many people suffer from a stressful lifestyle. They want a way to relax. Someone else

wants to reduce blood pressure. Another person seeks mental clarity. Others want emotional balance. But when they start meditation, they soon begin to harvest benefits that far exceed these aims. Often, people are surprised to report a profound sense of spiritual well-being—a state reflected by the presence of inner joy and even bliss. It is as if a hungry person asks for a small scrap of food, but then, someone surprises them with a banquet' (4).

Daaji tells us that meditation 'creates naturalness' and as one proceeds 'toward naturalness, that which is unnatural in you starts to disappear' (5). Practical experience of spirituality is the only way to transcend differences. Daaji says that when 'we lack practical experience, the various religions appear to speak different languages' (8). A mere theoretical knowledge of various religions does not help us in affirming their validity or understanding the fact that all religions are proceeding towards truth. Meditation makes both 'knowledge and experience ... extremely useful' (11). Inner change depends, says Daaji, on 'whether there is more of me or less of me' or 'whether there is more of God or less of God' (12). He compares the stubborn ego to a stubborn donkey. While everyone meditates in one way or the other doing one's day-to-day activities, the 'object of meditation makes all the difference. A profound object gives us a profound consciousness. A mundane object gives us a mundane consciousness. A temporary object makes our meditative state of mind temporary. A profound, changeless object makes our meditation permanent' (17).

About the mind being restless or disturbed, Daaji says: 'Many say that the mind's nature is to be restless ... I would like to dispel that notion. ... When something draws your attention and holds it there, you become unmindful of unwanted thoughts. You only need to give your mind something to sink its teeth into—something really absorbing. Then you will observe just how naturally it stabilizes, how effortlessly it focuses' (18). Daaji calls meditation an 'effortless focus' (21). He poignantly defines desire: 'Desire is the soul's misdirected urge for completion' (ibid.). Echoing the words of the Upanishads, he says that the mind seeks 'a fulfillment to end all fulfillments' (24). Getting stuck to one particular stage of meditation or expecting the next stage are great pitfalls

in the practice. Daaji assures us that 'whatever you may experience, there is always something beyond it' (37). Love is defined as 'something that never really arrives. We approach it, and before we arrive, we have already transcended it. But we never pass through it! It gets closer and closer, and when it can get no closer, the whole business is already behind us. It is a mysterious thing!' (43). Daaji tells us that meditation 'is really a form of waiting—relaxed, patient waiting, without any expectation' (90).

Daaji says that raja yoga 'incorporates' karma, bhakti, and jnana yogas and hence it is called the 'king of yogas' (44). He says that only meditation can fulfil any of these yogas. This is quite contrary to what Swami Vivekananda says when he propounds that the same truth can be attained by each of the four yogas. Swamiji says: 'Karma-Yoga ... is a system of ethics and religion intended to attain freedom through unselfishness ... The Karma-Yogi need not believe in any doctrine whatever. He may not believe even in God, may not ask what his soul is, nor think of any metaphysical speculation' (*The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, 9 vols (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1-8, 1989; 9, 1997), I.III). It is clear that Swamiji's karma yoga does not need meditation.

Daaji says that the Heartfulness Way 'is a streamlined version of raja yoga—streamlined in the sense that it has been made effective for modern seekers who don't have the luxury of dropping everything and devoting every waking moment to meditation' (50).

An unbelievably simple exposition of the discipline of meditation in a crystal-clear language is what the entire book is all about. In an anecdotal storytelling style, we are brought intricate discussions on the practice of meditation. The important aspects of Patanjali's *Yoga Sutra* are also discussed and made accessible. This book is a step-by-step guide to the theory and practice of meditation told in an easy to understand manner. Meditation, cleaning, prayer, and the need for a guru are all explained in different chapters. For anyone interested in meditation in general, and the Heartfulness Way in particular, this is the go-to guide, a manual for practice.

Editor

Prabuddha Bharata

# MANANA

**Exploring thought-currents from around the world.  
Extracts from a thought-provoking book every month.**

## ***Dying: A Transition***

Monika Renz

Trans. Mark Kyburz and John Peck

Columbia University Press, 61 West 62 Street, New York, NY 10023. 2015. x + 164 pp. \$38. HB. ISBN 9780231170888.



## ***The Three Stages of Transition and Dignity***

### ***Transformation is More Than a Path***

ELISABETH KÜBLER-ROSS (1974), the pioneer of end-of-life care, divided the dying process into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Like the grieving process, dying, for Kübler-Ross, appears to be characterized by defiance and intense feeling until acceptance eventually occurs. The enduring value of Kübler-Ross's writings lies in her emphasizing the importance of acceptance and in summoning the courage to communicate with the dying. And yet her view falls short of the mystery of dying. Critics regard Kübler-Ross's approach as too linear and too pathologizing. Rather than describing what happens specifically as we approach death, Kübler-Ross speaks of the inner path that we must take until we accept dying.

In my experience, though, this challenge presents itself after every shock of diagnosis and after each stroke of fate. Going toward our inevitable death involves more than taking an inner path toward acceptance. Here transformation occurs. Path and transformation are two separate matters. The ego is able to cognize what a linear path is, in spite of up-and-down, back-and-forth

movements. Transformation, by contrast, brings the ego up against limits that require it to stop thinking, understanding, expecting and controlling. Thus, in transformation, the ego must surrender its governing authority. The linearity of life passes into the roundedness, simultaneity, and nonlocality of being. Transformation leads us into unsuspected dimensions. One crucial obstacle that we must overcome in the dying process consists in actually accepting transformation and deliverance. Whereas acceptance is a prerequisite for 'it' to happen, it is only one aspect of the whole event. I have often observed that if patients find their inner 'yes', then the process continues.

What else characterizes the dying process? The body, as the embodiment (i.e., the concentration and materialization) of this ego-centred subject, dies. And with it—and thereby initiating dying—ego-centred perception and experience wane. Dying is first characterized by a growing awareness of the end. After such realization various processes set in, including a fundamental shift in consciousness.

The dying process can be divided into three phenomenologically distinct stages: *pre-transition* (before the inner threshold in consciousness), *transition itself* (across the threshold), and *post-transition* (after the threshold). Post-transition should not, however, be regarded as an

'otherworld' or 'afterlife' but as the most extreme state of being in this world. Many patients in our study experienced each of these stages several times.

From an observational and phenomenological perspective, we have no knowledge of such an otherworld, in spite of everything we know about dying and near-death experience. Religions are often concerned with the concept of the otherworld or afterlife. Because we call it 'belief', we admit our lack of knowledge. In its attempt to approach the eternal mystery, this book looks in both directions to embrace contrasting aspects. On the one hand, it considers with utmost seriousness the testimonies of the dying and the metaphorical statements of religions about eschatology (theology's concern with the last things and the final destiny of the soul); on the other, it adopts the strict and modest stance of knowing nothing about the final mystery. It seems to me extremely important to maintain such final awe if we are to care respectfully for the dying. We cannot answer their final questions, let alone our own. This book does not contain statements about death *per se*, but it does deal with approaching death and with the 'near-death sphere'.

### **Pre-transition:**


#### **Before the Threshold in Consciousness**

Pre-transition constitutes a looking ahead, toward the threshold. On the one hand, positively experienced, impressive sensual perceptions, experiences of the here and now, and personal relationships often occur because of an enhanced intensity in this stage. On the other hand, the dying undergo negative emotions: they see the nearing 'end', and fear a 'demise', which is experienced even by religious persons. In the midst of suffering, many of those believers are at first disappointed by their God. Therapeutic-spiritual and pastoral care that does not eschew the

question of God can help patients to arrive at a new, more adequate understanding of God.

Pre-transition is a time of *kenosis*, a time of radically giving up. The ego is deprived of all its possessions, of everything it used to be, of all identity and expectation. Pre-transition, among other factors, includes the reactions triggered by impending loss (e.g., denial) and the mental processes involved (e.g., the decision to consent, leave-taking, making one's last will). In this stage family processes are intense, and conflicts or distress are often resolved (catharsis). Some patients conduct a life review and let themselves be moved by unsuspected, hidden dimensions of meaning.

Moreover, When death draws closer, day after day, hour after hour, it becomes like an avalanche crashing down a mountain or like a yawning chasm. 'I am being devoured', one dying patient groaned. Later, she added, 'I shall let myself be defeated by the angel', which indicated the stage of transition itself. Another dying patient felt completely lost. Later he found shelter and felt safe, which marked the stage of post-transition.

Time and again, the many symptoms suffered in pre-transition (helplessness, decreasing mobility, occasional pain, itching, thirst, nausea, etc.) are humiliating. In pre-transition, the ego remains dominant, and experience is confined to the spatial and temporal limitations of the body. Physical decline causes great suffering, fear, and shame, and patients are often unable to see beyond their strickenness. In the words of the dying. 'It is getting worse every morning. I am able to do less and less'; I am very angry at God. How can God allow such suffering?'; 'I was properly dressed all my life. Now I look like skeleton.' Such moments, which may go on for hours, are also difficult for relatives to endure. Relatives are challenged to empathize with their loved one and to bear with themselves. 



# REPORTS



*Inauguration of Vivekananda Netralaya, Dehradun*

## **New Mission Centre**

**Ramakrishna Mission, Cuttack**, which was a sub-centre of Ramakrishna Mission, Bhubaneswar, has been made a full-fledged branch centre of Ramakrishna Mission. Its address is 'Ramakrishna Mission, Mata Math, Ring Road, Cuttack, Odisha 753001', phone: 0671-2305300, and email: <cuttack@rkmm.org>.

## **News of Branch Centres**

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission and Adhyaksha, Ramakrishna Math, Chennai, inaugurated the renovated and extended physiotherapy unit at **Ramakrishna Math, Chennai** on 4 April 2018.

V P Singh Badnore, Governor of Punjab, participated in the annual celebration of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Chandigarh** on 8 April and addressed the gathering.

Swami Suvirananda, General Secretary, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the living rooms of the students' home at **Ramakrishna Math, Chandipur** on 8 April.

Srimat Swami Suhitanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, declared open the first floor of the patients' recovery building at **Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Muzaffarpur** on 8 April.

Swami Suvirananda inaugurated the school building of Ma Sarada Vidyamandir at Orchha in Chhattisgarh on 11 April. The Vidyamandir is run by Vivekananda Institute of Social Health, Welfare And Service (VISHWAS), an organisation working in association with **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narainpur**.

The Narainpur centre held a sports meet from

12 to 16 April in which 1,482 students from 37 schools of 3 districts in Chhattisgarh participated. Swami Suvirananda flagged off the event.

**Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Dehradun** celebrated its centenary from 17 to 19 April with public meetings, a youths' convention, and music concerts, attended by about 200 monks and 2,200 devotees. On this occasion, Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj inaugurated the new monks' quarters named Swami Ranganathananda Bhavan, and Swami Suvirananda inaugurated the eye care centre named Vivekananda Netralaya.

On 18 April, Srimat Swami Prabhanandaji Maharaj, Vice-President, Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, inaugurated the new school building of Shishu Vidyavithi of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur** and also released the platinum jubilee commemorative volume of the centre.

Srimat Swami Gautamanandaji Maharaj dedicated Saradananda Bhavan, the new building for running skill development courses, at Vivekananda Cultural Centre of **Ramakrishna Mission, Shillong** on 27 April. Sri Ganga Prasad, Governor of Meghalaya, and many other dignitaries, monks, and about 2,500 students and devotees attended the programme. On this occasion, the centre held a symposium on Swamiji's message of religious catholicity, public meetings, a devotees' convention, and cultural events on 28 and 29 April. A commemorative volume and a documentary film on the centre's activities were also released.

The name of **Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Karimganj** has been changed from 'Ramakrishna Mission Seva Samiti' to 'Ramakrishna Mission'.

Four of our degree colleges have secured good

positions in the all-India rankings for the year 2018 announced by National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, on 3 April. The details are as follows: 1. Vidyamandira (Saradapitha): Rank 9; 2. Vivekananda Centenary College (Rahara): Rank 29; 3. Science and Arts College (Coimbatore Mission): Rank 39; 4. Residential College (Narendrapur): Rank 40.

Two students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Deoghar** and fourteen students of the Vidyalyaya of **Ramakrishna Mission Ashrama, Narendrapur** won the prestigious Kishore Vaigyanik Protsahan Yojana (KVPY) Fellowship 2017.

Three students of **Ramakrishna Mission Vidyapith, Purulia** secured the top three ranks at the state level in the International Olympiad of Mathematics conducted by Silverzone Foundation, New Delhi.

### Relief

**Fire Relief: Arunachal Pradesh:** In response to an accidental fire in Siyom village on 10 January, **Aalo** centre distributed 17 blankets, 4 sets of utensils (each set containing a *karahi*, a cooking pot, a kettle, a bucket, 4 plates, 4 bowls, a ladle, a jug, a tumbler, and a mug), 6 shirts, 6 trousers, 2 tops, 8 jackets, 8 sweaters, and stationery items among 4 affected families on 16 January.

In another fire incident in a colony in Itanagar, 48 houses were gutted. **Itanagar** centre distributed 216 kg rice, 96 kg dal, 48 litres of edible oil, 48 kg salt, 48 kg *poha* (rice flakes), 48 kg *muri* (puffed rice), 12 kg tea leaves, 48 kg sugar, 96 plates, 96 tumblers, 48 mugs, 48 tea strainers, 48 buckets, 48 *karahis*, 48 *dekchis* (cooking pots), 96 ladles, 48 trunks, 48 mats, 48 bars of soap, 48 tubes of toothpaste, 192 toothbrushes, 48 packets of candles, and 48 packets of matchboxes among 48 affected families on 21 January.

**Distress Relief:** The following centres

distributed various items, shown against their names, to needy people: **India: Bamunmura:** 248 school bags from 9 to 16 January. Chapra: 1,000 saris, 450 dhotis, and 201 school bags from 19 January to 24 February. **Chennai Vidyapith:** 125 T-shirts, 125 school bags, 250 notebooks, 125 pens, 250 pencils, 125 erasers, 125 sharpeners, 125 rulers, 125 pencil boxes, and 125 crayon boxes. **Deoghar:** 2,856 shirts, 4,270 trousers, 925 T-shirts, 1,065 tops, 1,021 other ladies dresses, and 494 belts from 2 to 21 January. **Garbeta:** 3,233 shirts and 6 T-shirts from 30 September to 24 December 2017. **Halasuru:** 514 saris from 4 to 6 February. **Jamshedpur:** 1,050 shirts, 254 T-shirts, and 1,061 trousers from 15 December to 28 January. **Jayrambati:** 5,161 saris and 253 school bags from 26 December to 4 February. **Kanpur:** 625 shirts from 10 to 25 January. **Khetri:** 2,724 shirts, 4,752 trousers, 18 T-shirts, and 1,639 tops from 2 November to 20 February. **Koalpara** (sub-centre of Jayrambati Ashrama): 850 saris from 10 to 23 November. **Koyilandy:** 181 saris and 92 solar lanterns on 18 February. **Lalgarh:** 2,105 shirts, 4,405 trousers, 1,826 tops, and 920 other ladies dresses from 22 September to 12 February. **Puri Math:** 1,107 shirts and 1,190 trousers from 3 January to 11 February. **Ramharipur:** 3,600 notebooks, 2,400 pens, 1,200 pencils, 1,200 erasers, and 600 sharpeners on 12 January. **Ranchi Morabadi:** 2,217 shirts, 2,306 saris, 2,191 belts, and 2,382 wallets from 1 January to 12 February. **Sargachhi:** 285 saris and 249 school bags from 4 January to 6 February. **Tiruvalla:** 54 packets of biscuits on 31 January. **Vijayawada:** 100 kg wheat flour, 250 kg dal, 100 kg *dalia* (broken wheat), 100 kg *suji* (semolina), 100 litres of edible oil, and 25 kg garlic on 20 February. **Bangladesh: Dinajpur:** 27 saris, 24 dhotis, 33 plates, and 33 tumblers on 13 October and 7 December.

**Economic Rehabilitation: Zambia: Lusaka** centre gave 2 sewing machines for the benefit of needy people on 7 February.



# An Appeal

Dear Devotees & Well-wishers,

We all know that **Tirtharaj Prayag (Allahabad)** is a place for versatility of religions and spirituality. Not only different sects of the Hindu Dharma, but also people of all religion and faith come to Prayag to feel the gigantic vibrations penetrating the very spiritual atmosphere of Tirtharaj Prayag. One can see confluence of religions during the time of **Kumbha Mela**, which is a sort of a mini **India**. By the grace of spiritual teachers from time immemorial, pious devotees come to **Kumbha Mela** to take dip in the Triveni Sangam— and be sanctified. The upcoming **Kumbha Mela** is scheduled from 14 January to 19 February 2019. **Per Government estimates, more than 15 crore sadhus, devotees and pilgrims will take bath in the holy water during the Mela.**



**Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad, will take this opportunity to extend its helping hand of service among more than five lakh Sadhus, Devotees and Pilgrims from the remotest corners of the country.** This will be a unique opportunity for us to spread the message of the Holy Trio among devotees — and receive blessings by fulfilling the dream of Swamiji: "**Service to Man is Service to God.**" With the blessings of the Most Revered **Swami Vijnananandaji Maharaj** (the founder of Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama, Allahabad in the year 1910), we are planning to organise a camp in the bank of Triveni Sangam.

During the Mela days, the following facilities will be provided to devotees/pilgrims:

- ❖ Prayer cum lecture hall
- ❖ Round-the-clock free charitable dispensary with emergency facilities
- ❖ Book stall
- ❖ Photo gallery of the Holy Trio
- ❖ Boarding/lodging facilities for Sadhus, devotees and pilgrims.

**The expected cost of this Kumbha Mela Camp is calculated at approx. Rs 1,50,00,000 (Rupees one crore and fifty lakh only).** To meet such high expense we request to you and other generous devotees to contribute and help us in our good work — as well as be a member in the **SevaYajna** started by **Swami Vivekananda** himself.

**Your kind donation will be gladly accepted and acknowledged which may be either A/C payee Cheque / Draft in favour of 'Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama— Allahabad' or by Bank Transfer (NEFT/RTGS) on State Bank of India, Allahabad, A/C no: 10210448619, IFSC: SBIN0002584 . All the donations are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80G(5)(vi) of Income tax Act, 1961. Please send your Pan No: along with your Donation. Our PAN No is AAAARIO77P.**

Hope all of you will grab this unique opportunity by helping us to make our Mission successful.



**Ramakrishna Mission Sevashrama**  
Vijnanananda Marg, Mutthiganj, Allahabad -211 003  
Phone : (0532) 2413369, Mob: 9453630406  
E-mail : rkmsald@gmail.com; allahabad@rkmm.org

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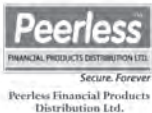
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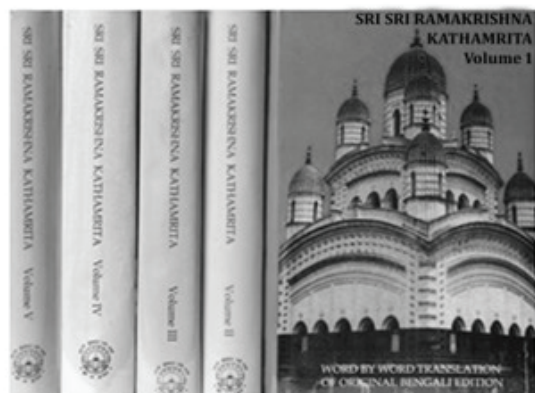
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*We want to lead mankind to the place where there is neither the Vedas, nor the Bible, nor the Koran; yet this has to be done by harmonising the Vedas, the Bible and the Koran.*

*Mankind ought to be taught that religions are but the varied expressions of THE RELIGION, which is Oneness, so that each may choose the path that suits him best.*

*Swami Vivekananda*



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# Mayavati Appeal

Date: April 15 2018

Dear Friends,

Please accept our hearty greetings from the Himalayas!

Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) had always been attracted by the beauty, sublimity and solitude of the Himalayas. During his tour of the Swiss Alps he conceived the idea to establish an Ashrama in India in similar conditions.

The main heritage building of the Ashrama, where Swami Vivekananda had stayed, is now 120 years old. **It is in a dilapidated condition, and in need of urgent conservation.** The original Prabuddha Bharata editorial office, Captain Henry Sevier's cottage and Mother Sevier's cottage, are also in need of urgent repair. **The overall cost for conservation in this earthquake prone, remote area of Mayavati is 3.92 Cr.**



On 23 March 2018, the work was blessed and inaugurated by the President of Ramakrishna Math and Ramakrishna Mission, Srimat Swami Smarananandaji Maharaj.

We therefore solicit your much needed support to preserve the spiritual atmosphere of Mayavati for future generations. Kindly send a generous donation at your earliest convenience. All donations may be sent in favour of **ADVAITA ASHRAMA by Cheque/Demand Draft/NEFT/RTGS**. Bank details are as follows: Bank Name: State Bank of India, Branch: Lohaghat. **Account No. 10925686743 , IFS Code: SBIN0002569.**

In case of direct transfer through NEFT or payment via cheque/demand draft, etc., **please immediately email us at [mayavati@rkmm.org](mailto:mayavati@rkmm.org)**, providing us with your **name, address, PAN (if Indian citizen), and the purpose of the donation** so that we may link and acknowledge quickly.

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With gratitude and best wishes,  
Yours in service,  
Swami Muktidananda  
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The best guide in life is strength.  
In religion, as in all other matters,  
discard everything that weakens  
you, have nothing to do with it.  
—Swami Vivekananda

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